

## Parent Update

August 28, 2020

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Hello everyone,

I want to start by saying that I share everyone's excitement for the start of a new school year where we have the opportunity to return to a greater sense of normalcy and routine. That said, I also share everyone's discomfort with some of the risks we may never be able to fully eliminate.

I want you to know that despite the global situation we find ourselves in, I would not hesitate to send my own children to school if they hadn't already graduated. I would do this because I feel so strongly about the benefits of face to face learning, I truly believe in our caring and qualified staff, and I know that the number one predictor of success for schools operating in a pandemic are low community numbers. The number of active cases in our Chinook's Edge school communities is very low by comparison to other areas of the province and other jurisdictions in general, and they have been low since the beginning. When I combine that with all of the efforts to adhere to Alberta Health guidelines in our Division, I have every confidence our school year will start off positively and my worries will be minimized.

It also helps add to my level of confidence when Chief Medical Officer Dr. Deena Hinshaw says, *"I think there is no one perfect way to go back to school, and I am convinced that it is critical to help our children get back into school in person, and to work on balancing the risks of Covid with the risks of all the other things children face, the risk of not being in school for example."* (Edmonton Journal, August 27th)

While we cannot completely eliminate risk, I want to be clear that we have gone to tremendous lengths to minimize it. Also, I do understand why some of our families are making the decision to keep their child at home at this time. Whether their child is medically vulnerable, or as a family they have their own reasons for not sending their child to school, I want them to know that we will still work hard to support them and keep them connected to Chinook's Edge School Division.

For those of you who are sending your child to school, there are a number of critically important ways you can help us as parents. Please pay special attention to the ones we have outlined because they help your child, other children, our staff, and our communities all stay safe. When we all stay safe, the learning can thrive as it has in the past, and students can get all of the support that they might need over time.

In the spirit of being particularly thoughtful and careful about how we transition back to school, we are asking for you as a parent to support our plan to stagger the start of the school year. With significantly reduced student populations for the first six days, we are purposely allowing

staff the time they will need to get this right. They need this transition time to carefully orchestrate important routines, and to build relationships that are essential to ensure everyone's safety and the learning environment itself.

As we mentioned in our August 12th letter to parents, we are asking families with surnames from A-K to send their children to school on Sept. 1st, 3rd, and 8th, while those families with surnames from L-Z are to send their children to school on Sept. 2nd, 4th and 9th. For parents of Kindergarten students only, your child's school may communicate a different staggered start schedule. We are keeping student populations low to ensure that:

- a) Routines expected by Alberta Health such as entrance and exit procedures, handwashing, the appropriate use of masks, physical distancing, hallway movement, etc. are all taught carefully to every single one of our students.
- b) Our teachers and support staff are given quality time with a smaller number of students to build lasting relationships that will be critically important for them to maintain safe and engaging learning environments.
- c) Our teachers will have focussed time to identify learning needs before class sizes return to more normal levels on Thursday, Sept. 10th.

Thursday, September 10th will be our first day to see our Re-entry Plan completely in action when all students will be in attendance. To fully ensure our plan is the best it can be, we will be moving the September 25th PD day to Friday, September 11th so that staff can take some time to reflect and act upon what we learn from a staggered September start-up. As a result of this decision, there will now be school on Friday, September 25th and there will not be school for students on Friday, September 11th. Changes to the 2020-21 calendar have been posted to our website.

As I mentioned earlier, I have every confidence in our staff and in our plan. We will go slowly and we will get it right. I am convinced that if we get off to a safe, positive start, we will be able to maintain that momentum throughout the school year.

To help you become fully aware of Chinook's Edge School Division's Re-entry Plan [please click on this link](#) and read it over carefully. Our hope is that you can become familiar with the re-entry guidelines as a family and see how you can help us keep our students and staff as safe as possible.

To help us out prior to your child's return to school, we are asking all of you as parents to ensure that you:

- a) Familiarize yourselves and your children with our [Re-entry Plan](#).
- b) Click on the link for [assessing your child's health](#) and create a daily morning routine where you and your child will carefully complete the daily self assessment. *It is critically important that you keep your child home if they are showing any symptoms.*

- c) Take some time at home to allow your child to get used to [wearing a mask](#) prior to arriving at school.
- d) Help us keep everyone safe by honouring our expectation that you do not enter school buildings without a specific purpose and permission from the school Principal.

It is really important as we move forward that you know we will be making adjustments to our Re-entry Plan as needed along the way. Since our last letter, there have been changes to the daily health checklist, how we are postponing extra-curricular programs, and how we are moving forward with the usage of masks.

Speaking of masks, I would also consider taking my child mask shopping this weekend if I felt that the government provided colours might not match my child's personal preferences. While they will meet the expectations laid out by Alberta Health, many of our students will likely be disappointed by the lack of choice, and the potential discomfort with a mask someone else has chosen for them.

For those families requiring remote learning to start the year, thank you for letting us know. We will contact you prior to the end of the day on Monday, August 31st.

As a carefully graduated return to face to face learning at school proceeds, I would encourage you to take time to build a very positive relationship with your child's teacher and your local school. We pride ourselves on relationships built on kindness and understanding throughout Chinook's Edge School Division. We all need to support each other now more than ever.

Thank you so much for your patience. I truly believe that we have set ourselves up very well for a fantastic year in Chinook's Edge School Division.

Yours truly,

Kurt Sacher  
Superintendent of Schools