

DISTRICT RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We acknowledge that for thousands of years the Malahat, Lake Cowichan, Quw'utsun, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, and Lyackson Peoples have walked gently on the unceded territories where we now live, work, and play. We are committed to ensuring a healthy educational environment for our xe'xe' smun'eem, our sacred children, that is based on science and inclusive of traditional knowledge and history.

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

In developing this plan, we have grounded our work in the latest health and safety information provided to us by the BC Centre for Disease Control, Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry, and WorkSafeBC. Health and safety have been, and always will be, the first priority for both students and staff. Our District Joint Health and Safety Committee started meeting early this summer and continues to meet regularly. School-based Health and Safety Committees have been meeting since August 20th to ensure localized health and safety plans are in place that meet or exceed all of the provincial guidelines as they prepare for the return of students and staff. Orientation plans and videos have been developed to ensure consistent safety protocol training for everyone.

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MASKS, HANDWASHING, AND CLEANING:

Although masks are an excellent visual reminder of the health and safety guidelines many of us choose to use, they are not the first, nor best, line of defense against the transmission of illness. We know that regular hand washing with soap and water, and practicing safe physical distancing are the best ways to avoid transmission of many illnesses, including COVID-19. There will be times when safe physical distancing outside of the learning group (described below) is not possible. For those times, the school district has ordered two non-medical, reusable masks for every staff member and student. Masks are required for all staff and secondary students when physical distancing is not possible outside of learning groups, e.g. buses, hallways, common areas, and certain electives. Although masks are not required for elementary students, the district has also purchased reusable masks for every elementary student should they or their parents / guardians request it. A large stock of disposable masks has also been purchased in the event a student or staff member does not have their reusable mask accessible.

‘Soap, Water, and Common Sense’ is the adage for our current situation. To help facilitate that, new portable handwashing stations have been ordered, and will be installed at schools. We have also purchased a large quantity of approved hand sanitizer and pump bottles that will be in every classroom at entry points in the school.

The district has also purchased several electrostatic cleaners, which will be used by trained custodians outside of school hours. The disinfectant that will be used in the cleaners is one of Health Canada’s “approved disinfectants” considered effective against COVID-19 making it both an effective and safe product.

These cleaners will help our custodial teams ensure that our spaces are efficiently and effectively disinfected each night. High-touch areas will also be cleaned during the day.

More information on the Health and Safety guidelines can be found at www.sd79.bc.ca

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CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENTS:

Schools are considered “controlled environments” in that they have a comprehensive set of safety measures in place, a consistent and limited group of people accessing the building, and the majority of those people are children who are at lower risk for transmitting COVID-19. Compared to some other community settings that are considered uncontrolled environments (such as grocery stores, retail outlets, and restaurants), schools are able to exert greater control over their own environments. The combination of these features greatly reduces the risk of children and youth transmitting any illness.

LEARNING GROUPS:

A learning group is a group of students and staff who stay together through a length of time and primarily interact only with one another. Learning groups can be a single class, a group of classes, or a group of students who share courses (secondary). They can also include a wide variety of staff, but are consistent in their makeup. Learning groups allow for schools to maintain a safe and controlled environment, and allow for safe social interactions within the group.

Learning group size limits were established by provincial medical health officers based on a number of considerations including:

- Compared to some other community settings, schools are considered “controlled environments” as described above.
- The significant academic, social and emotional benefits of providing more students with more in-class learning time in a closer to normal learning environment – minimizing learning gaps, increasing peer interaction and support, decreasing feelings of isolation.

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LEARNING GROUPS (CONTINUED):

- The typical format of instruction in B.C. (e.g. one teacher with a consistent group of students in elementary, multiple teachers and inconsistent groupings of students in secondary).
- The low community prevalence of COVID-19 currently in B.C., particularly among school-aged children.
- Provincial contact tracing and testing capacity.

Learning groups will be smaller for elementary students, recognizing that it's more challenging for younger children to maintain physical distance from each other, while older students are better able to minimize physical contact, practice hand hygiene, and recognize if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Allowing larger learning groups in secondary schools also enables more flexibility in meeting students' diverse learning needs.

Typically we have 3 bubbles: a family bubble, a social bubble and a work bubble. A learning group for students would be considered their work bubble.

ELEMENTARY LEARNING GROUPS:

In elementary, learning groups will consist of 2 – 3 classes (depending on class sizes), with no learning group exceeding 60 people. Students, for the most part, will be with their teacher, and may be joined with another class for lunch breaks, field trips, and other activities, thus creating a learning group. As much as possible, support and non-enrolling staff will be included within a learning group. Having 2 – 3 classes that work primarily on their own allows for teachers, such as Learning Assistant teachers and Education Assistants, to interact with only one learning group at a time.

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ELEMENTARY LEARNING GROUPS: (CONTINUED):

In some cases, depending on the size of school, outside play time at lunch will be staggered to allow for minimal learning groups to be out at any one time. Schools may also assign different areas of the field to different learning groups.

In some of our larger elementary schools the start and end times may be staggered by 5 - 10 minutes to allow for less crowding, especially at the end of day when everyone typically leaves at the same time. All schools will utilize all the entrance/exit doors to spread students out and keep entrances and hallways moving freely.

SECONDARY LEARNING GROUPS:

Our small secondary school, Lake Cowichan School, with grade cohorts of fewer than 40 will be assigning their grade 10-12s together in one learning group, and then their 8-9s together into another learning group, allowing them to run their usual semester schedule with little impact on staffing or students.

Three of our secondary schools with large numbers are moving from a semester system to a quarter system. Within the quarter system, students will be anchored by an elective as their learning group, allowing for the learning group to move from class to class.

There are many complexities in timetabling our secondary schools where electives are taught to multiple grades in the same class e.g. Band 10-12. Some electives may not be available due to difficulties in physically distancing or maintaining learning groups. Some electives will be given priority when timetabling e.g. post-secondary pre-requisite courses, and some students may not get all of their elective choices.

Quamichan School is adjusting to a linear timetable by creating learning groups of students in both grades. Although physical distancing may be required in some of their exploratories, they feel that they can make this schedule fit for all students while ensuring safety for all.

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SUPPORT STAFF:

Learning Assistant and Resource Teachers will either be assigned to a learning group for periods of time, such as 6 – 10 weeks, to support those students before moving to another learning group, or work with multiple learning groups and practice physical distancing. They will wear non-medical face masks and, in some cases, face shields when physical distancing is not possible when working with a student or students.

Education Assistants (EA) will be assigned to a learning group. If an EA is required to work with a student or students outside their learning group, physical distancing or non-medical masks will be used.

Other non-enrolling teachers and support staff that work on site, such as librarians, prep teachers, Indigenous Support Workers, etc., who are not able to be a part of a learning group may work within multiple learning groups while practicing physical distancing and/or wearing a non-medical mask.

Itinerant teachers and district specialists such as coordinators, Speech and Language Pathologists, English Language Learners Teachers, Counselors, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists, etc. will work at many schools and will be required to physical distance. They will wear non-medical masks, and in some cases face shields, when physical distancing is not possible when working with a student or students.

Teachers teaching on call (TTOCs) and casual CUPE support staff who may work at many schools will be required to maintain proper physical distancing. They will wear non-medical face masks, and in some cases face shields, when physical distancing is not possible when working with a student or students. If a TTOC or casual support staff member works with a group for a week or more, they can then be considered part of that learning group should their work with that group continue for a longer period of time.

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SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS:

The Cowichan Valley School District is committed to treating students with disabilities and their families ethically, fairly, and respectfully. We continue to offer full-time, in-school support and instruction to students with disabilities/diverse abilities and students requiring additional support. Families and school teams play a critical role in collaborating and creating a transition plan for students returning to school.

- All students will be in inclusive learning groups supported by school-based inclusive support teachers and itinerant staff as required:
- Students with complex needs will continue to be supported as outlined in their IEPs; and the goals of the IEP will be followed.
- Teachers and support staff will be provided with orientation and training consistent with district health and safety plans and school-based health and safety plans and protocols.
- Transition plans from year-end IEPs will be reviewed in consultation with families, and appropriate staff and communicated to families and staff. WorkSafeBC procedures will be communicated and made accessible to all staff.

TRANSPORTATION:

When possible, we encourage families to make alternate arrangements rather than busing this year. However, our Transportation Department will be up and running for any registered student who needs it. To reduce the number of close, in-person interactions on school buses, our health and safety procedure recommends the following strategies:

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TRANSPORTATION (CONTINUED):

Buses will be cleaned and disinfected according to the guidance provided in [BC Centre for Disease Control's Guidelines on Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings.](#)

Bus drivers will clean their hands often, including before and after completing trips as well as wearing a non-medical mask.

Parents and caregivers must complete a Daily Health Assessment for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease before sending children to school. If a child has any symptoms, they must not take the bus or go to school.

Parents are asked to ensure that students clean their hands before they leave home to take the bus, when they leave school prior to taking the bus, and when they get home.

Parents will be asked to support their child to physically distance while waiting for the bus for pick up.

Where possible, bus line up areas will be set up to prevent crowding, and allow for physical distancing of 2m (e.g., tape on pavement, etc.).

Students will be required to use their bus pass to scan on and off the bus for the purpose of contact tracing.

- Names of students will be recorded if no bus pass is provided;
- Up-to-date passenger lists will be kept to share with public health should contact tracing need to occur.

Students should not plan for friends to ride home with them on the bus – only registered students are permitted to ride a bus.

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TRANSPORTATION (CONTINUED):

Hand sanitizer will be provided to students as they board the bus

Face masks are mandatory for secondary students, who should wear a reusable mask. Disposable masks will be available from the Bus Driver in the event that the student does not have their reusable mask.

Students will load the bus from the back to the front.

Siblings will be asked to sit together on high-capacity routes.

If space is available, students will be assigned to their own seat.

Students will be asked to sit by the window if seated alone.

Bus drivers will use consistent seating as much as possible.

When unloading the bus at school, all students will exit the bus starting from front to back.

When unloading the bus at home, students will exit the bus starting with the most forward student. Students will be passing by other seated students but are asked to exit without contacting or engaging with seated students.

Bus drivers will wear a mask and gloves when in close contact with a student(s) who requires special care such as restraints.

The Transportation Department will be in contact with parents who have registered their students as to how to pick up bus passes and masks etc.

Note: Cowichan Tribes' Transportation Department has been working very closely with our own department and will be aligning their protocols to match.

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CONCLUSION:

Our teachers, support staff, principals, vice principals, and all the staff who support your children are excited to see them back at school. Our work does not end with this plan, but will be revamped and adapted as we continually revise our protocols to reflect the safety needs of all. Our plans have been a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Education, union groups, Indigenous partners, and Parent Advisory Councils to ensure our schools are ready for the safe return of our students and staff. We look forward to welcoming students back on September 10th.