
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

Orientation week ensures a safe, ready and welcome return to school

VICTORIA – To ensure schools are ready to welcome students into classrooms for the week of Sept. 8-11, 2020, there will be a gradual restart to allow extra time to orient students and staff on the new health and safety measures in place.

“Schools are going to look different in September,” said Rob Fleming, Minister of Education. “Staff, students and parents need time to get familiar with all the new health and safety procedures that are designed to keep them safe and confident in their school settings.”

Starting Sept. 8, all staff will meet with their school’s joint health and safety committee to receive instructions about how the updated guidelines, co-developed with the BC Centre for Disease Control and provincial health officer, will work in their school. This will also allow time for educators and staff to adjust to their new routines, finalize plans for learning groups, review health and safety protocols, and confirm lesson plans that align with the new normal in schools.

Students will be welcomed back to class for orientation by Sept. 10 and will use their orientation time to get familiar with classrooms that will look different than they did before the pandemic. Students will be assigned to their class, find out who is in their learning group, practise their new routines and familiarize themselves with how to safely move from the class to outdoor and common areas of the school.

On Aug. 10, School districts were provided with readiness checklists to ensure they are updating their health and safety plans and considering, communicating and consulting with their unions, Indigenous rightsholders, staff and families in their local communities. They will also need to ensure their plans address equity and inclusion of children who require additional support in school.

Health and safety of teachers, staff and students is leading the work being done by the K-12 education restart steering committee and working groups with membership from all education partners and health experts. These groups are also working to create detailed operational guidelines, which will be available by Aug. 17 to support school districts with their restart plans, including guidance on:

- implementing the updated health and safety protocols;
- ensuring kids who require extra support are prioritized and have the services they need;
- supporting the mental health and wellness of students who may be experiencing additional challenges because of the pandemic;
- ensuring fewer contacts and a safe workplace for those who interact with more than one learning group – such as specialists, teachers on call, educational assistants, cafeteria staff or bus drivers;

- supporting hybrid instruction with a blend of in-person learning and remote learning for dense urban secondary schools with large student populations;
- minimizing physical contact within learning groups; and
- ensuring before- and after-school child care on school grounds allows kids to stay within their learning groups as much as possible.

“By working collaboratively with leaders in our education system, we are making sure students and staff are safe, ready and welcome when they return to school in September,” Fleming said.

To help guide the transition back to school in the safest way possible, Fleming has also been meeting regularly with the presidents of the BC Teachers' Federation, CUPE, B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, the B.C. School Trustees Association, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Métis Nation BC, the B.C. Principals and Vice Principals Association, BC Association of School Business Officials, BC School Superintendents Association and the Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia.

Learn More:

For more information on the K-12 Education Restart Plan, visit: gov.bc.ca/covid19returntoschool

For more information on WorksafeBC's guidelines for K-12 schools, visit: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/covid-19-returning-safe-operation/education>

To find a local school district, visit: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/bcmap.htm>

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