September 16, 2020

Dear parents/caregivers:

I am pleased to write that the first few days have gone very well in schools across the district, and part of our successful restart can be attributed to students and parents fully committing to new expectations, new routines and new structures. In particular, students have come back to school well-prepared and incredibly receptive to the new normal in classrooms, on school grounds and on school buses. It will continue to be a period of adjustment, but we have started well, there is excitement and energy in schools and that is a good sign for ongoing success.

In my letter of September 9, I noted the challenges faced by secondary schools in scheduling students as learning cohorts and the possibility that ADSS might have to incorporate self-directed learning into some students’ schedules. I am pleased to confirm that ADSS administrators have successfully rescheduled students into learning groups as required by PHO and Ministry of Education guidelines without having to rely on self-directed learning. Grade 8 and 9 students are scheduled as a learning group for both morning and afternoon classes while Grade 10-12 students are scheduled as a learning group in the morning and into cross learning group classes in the afternoon that follow physical distancing guidelines.

ADSS was able to avoid incorporating self-directed learning into afternoon classes through a combination of adding classes to reduce class sizes and clustering students in afternoon classes according to their morning learning groups. Further, amendments to physical distancing requirements announced last Friday also helped the school to schedule cross learning group classes while meeting physical distancing requirements. It means that some afternoon classes are physically arranged in a strict, controlled manner but it also means that ADSS was able to meet its primary goal of daily, in-class instruction for all students.

As students and staff settle into the new school year, our attention will turn to those learners who have not yet returned to school and to those Indigenous learners covered by our Local Education Agreements whose transition back to in-class instruction might require additional time and support. School administrators will continue to reach out to these families next week to get a clearer idea of their intentions going forward with the goal of having all students placed and engaged in a learning program by the end of September.

Finally, while it seems early to have a non-instructional day, a reminder that Monday, September 21 is a School Planning Day across the district. School Planning Days are historically the third Monday in September and this one will provide a much-needed opportunity for schools to reflect on school startup, to make any necessary adjustments and to turn our attention to the year ahead.

With respect,

Greg Smyth
Superintendent of Schools