August 26, 2020

Dear parents/caregivers:

I am writing today to confirm that SD70 has received Ministry approval for its Stage 2 Restart Plan and to describe how elementary and secondary schools are re-organizing for September 2020.

As you know, the Ministry of Education’s K-12 Education Restart Plan expects all schools in British Columbia will start up in Stage 2 with the goal of maximizing in-class instruction for all students within the revised public health guidelines to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. School Districts have been directed to develop a Stage 2 Restart Plan under these revised public health guidelines that provides for a full resumption of in-class instruction.

Under Stage 2, students will be organized as learning groups to receive full-time, in-class instruction. Learning groups are the recommendation of the Provincial Health Officer as a method to reduce the number of people each student or staff member comes into contact with and to reduce the number of close, in-person interactions. Learning groups become a way of organizing students and staff into smaller groups such as a single elementary class or a group of secondary students taking the same courses. Outside a learning group, appropriate physical distancing will remain the expectation. In common COVID19-terms, then, a learning group could be considered a small, collective “bubble” in which in-person interactions are reduced but physical distancing does not need to be maintained at all time.

At elementary schools, individual classrooms will be the learning group and will stay together for the instructional day, including scheduled break and lunch times. Outside of instructional time, these classes will be scheduled as a cohort to pre-determined playground areas for recess and lunch. Depending on school size, physical layout and supervision needs, a cohort might be an individual class or grade assigned to a specific area that best matches age level and aligns with classroom entrance/exit protocols.

At secondary schools, ADSS and USS have reorganized under a quarter model, generally reducing in-class instruction to two courses per term. Morning classes will become the students main learning group and, where possible, students will be scheduled into afternoon classes in a manner that maximizes continuity between morning and afternoon learning groups. Where students from different learning groups must mix in afternoon classes – a likelihood given the variety of elective options and scheduling challenges – mandated health and safety expectations will apply (ie. physical distancing, mask-wearing, etc.) As part of their learning program, students may also choose self-paced learning options offered through school-based Learning Commons programs.

In support of these programming approaches, extensive COVID19 safety measures and protocols are being implemented in elementary and secondary schools. These include enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols, additional hand sanitizing stations, floor/ceiling...
directional markers, physical barriers and, for secondary schools, the requirement for masks and physical distancing in high traffic areas like hallways and common gathering areas. For more detailed information on the District’s required COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan go to https://www.sd70.bc.ca/apps/pages/COVID-19_Updates

In spite of our considerable effort to organize students into learning groups and to implement COVID-19 safety measures, we know there are some families who remain uncertain about sending their child back to school and who have adopted a “wait and see” approach before committing to sending their child back to school. We understand and respect this uncertainty and, should parents want to “see how the first week goes”, we will retain their child’s place in their assigned elementary class through September 18th. At secondary schools, though, the daily pace of a secondary quarter system means any delayed commitment may put the student substantially behind and a decision will need to be made more quickly. A decision to attend or not attend, however, cannot be delayed indefinitely as schools will have out-of-catchment requests, class composition decisions and course change requests that must be made in a timely manner and which may result in their child losing his/her place in a classroom or course.

Under Stage 2, parents also have the option of enrolling their child in Distributed Learning or Homeschooling for the 2020/21 school year. If you are committed to having your child in Distributed Learning or Homeschooling, I ask that you consider SD70’s CHOICES DL program as a local option to support your child this school year. Enquiries can be directed to Mr. David Maher, Principal, Eighth Avenue Learning Centre.

We are also aware that some families are seeking an alternative to Stage 2 options of in-class instruction, Distributed Learning or Homeschooling. While a hybrid or blended model such as we saw last Spring is not considered under Stage 2, we know some families and/or communities have indicated they will not return to school under Stage 2’s health and safety guidelines. We appreciate that it might take more time for these families to choose one of the three learning options under Stage 2, and at elementary schools we have created within our Restart Plan a short-term, school-based alternative to in-class instruction that blends online learning with some in-person support. (Secondary students have a distributed learning option available through school-based Learning Commons.) **This is not meant to be a long-term, permanent learning option, but rather a transitional model that continues to connect learners to their elementary school and to provide an educational program while parents resolve any uncertainty or anxiety about returning their child to in-class instruction.** A practical downside to this temporary option is that the child’s classroom placement is likely to be lost and a return to in-class instruction may only be possible where there is available space, possibly in another school. This is because schools do not have the nimbleness to quickly, constantly change and reorganize should a parent want to have their child return to a regular classroom. Again, it is not a long term, sustainable alternative under the Ministry’s Stage 2 plan, so it must be considered a temporary way to support learning before a final decision is made about the three options under Stage 2.
As mentioned in my letter of August 17th, one of the greatest lessons learned from last Spring is students missed their classrooms, their peers, and their teachers, and many students and families struggled under a hybrid learning model. It is no surprise then, that as school administrators start to reach out to confirm student attendance and transportation needs, consistent feedback from parents and students is that they are excited to be returning to school in September. We look forward to seeing our students and reconnecting in familiar learning environments.

To parents who remain unsure about the September restart, I strongly encourage you to contact your school principal to discuss any concerns before making a decision that may jeopardize your child classroom placement or limit your child’s in-class options. We know from last year that the simple act of coming to school in June helped ease many students and parents’ anxiety and we are sure that this September will be no different.

Finally, in terms of the first week of school, all schools will be structuring student orientations on a gradual, staggered basis on September 10 and 11. Individual school schedules and times might vary between valley and west coast schools but the general approach is to bring smaller cohorts of students – by alphabet, learning group or by grade level – into schools for a couple of hours at a time. The actual schedule will be posted to District and school websites and communicated via regular school communication processes early next week.

I will write again next week, confirming the schedule for September 10 and 11, and sharing transportation plans and guidelines.

With respect,


Greg Smyth
Superintendent of Schools