

June 25, 2020

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update: Students, Parents/Legal Guardians, and Staff

This is an exciting time of the school term as we wrap up another year of learning and look forward to the summer break. As we reflect on the year that was, we celebrate our accomplishments and are thankful for the faithfulness of our God. On this final day of classes, we congratulate all of our students who have worked hard all year and especially during these difficult recent months. Now, it is time to enjoy a well-earned and much-needed break! A special congratulations to the high school graduating class of 2020. You have reached an important milestone in your lives, and your teachers and families are proud of you. We wish you all of the best in your future.

Report cards for students were issued electronically on June 25. Your child's school has communicated to you how students are to return school materials such as textbooks and technologies. If you have any questions or still need to return any school-owned resources, please contact your child's school.

School Re-entry

We continue to develop plans for school re-entry based on the feedback that we received from our students, parents/legal guardians, and staff through our recent school re-entry surveys and in accordance with the directions of the Alberta government and the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health. As I have mentioned before, my heartfelt appreciation goes to all those who took the time to share their ideas, concerns, and suggestions.

We are excited to welcome students back to school in the Fall. We are working collaboratively within our division and with surrounding school divisions and the government to develop a successful school re-entry plan. The safety of our students, parents/legal guardians, staff, and visitors is the top priority of everyone and has been incorporated into our protocols to meet Alberta Health Services' (AHS) guidelines.

Our staff are developing plans for physical distancing, cohorting (keeping, as much as possible, the same students and staff together), hand hygiene, cleaning and sanitizing, and all other safety measures, in order to provide the safest environment possible for our community. We will continue to work with students, parents/legal guardians, and staff to engage in a successful school re-entry plan together.

While the government [has not made any final decisions](#) regarding school operations for the 2020-2021 school year, it has [announced](#) that it is "targeting a return to near normal operations, with health measures in place" to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Three scenarios are being considered for the upcoming school year:

1. in-school classes resume (near normal with health measures),
2. in-school classes partially resume (with additional health measures), and
3. at-home learning continues (in-school classes are suspended/cancelled).

The province has said it will make its decision by August 1 and will mandate the scenario based on the Chief Medical Officer of Health's determination of what is required for public safety. Like all school jurisdictions in Alberta, our division may be directed to switch between scenarios, if necessary.

As noted below, we have identified important information regarding school re-entry that will be further detailed after the government's announcement on August 1.

Illness

This daily [Screening Questionnaire](#) supports parents/legal guardians in determining if their child is well enough to attend school. Parents/legal guardians are asked to use this checklist every day before sending their child(ren) to school or on the bus. If a child is sick, do not send him/her to school. If a child gets sick during the day, staff will notify parents/legal guardians immediately to pick the child up from school. While waiting for pick up, the child will be isolated from others and expected to wear a mask (when feasible). Schools will ensure that emergency contact lists are up to date, and that one of those contacts is available to pick up a child if the parent/legal guardian is not available.

If a child is ill, parents/legal guardians will be asked to use AHS' [Online Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine whether or not to proceed with a COVID-19 test. AHS considers two diagnosed people in a class to be an outbreak. We will follow all AHS requirements for notifying other parents/legal guardians should an outbreak happen.

Cleaning and personal protective equipment

Enhanced cleaning in all schools will take place throughout the day, especially doors, light switches, and other frequently-touched surfaces. Staff will wear face shields and masks, when necessary. There may be times when a child needs to wear a mask (i.e., if physical distancing isn't possible or if he/she becomes ill), so parents/legal guardians may choose to send a mask with their children to school. Students will be required to wash or sanitize their hands before entering and upon leaving classrooms as well as other times during the day. Hand sanitizer stations will be set up throughout the schools, especially where sinks are not close by.

Cohorts

Where possible, we will keep students and staff in similar groupings or "cohorts" to enable AHS to conduct contact-tracing should an outbreak occur. Seating plans will be in place for each class.

Movement through the school and locker use

We will minimize the number of students in hallways/common areas by using staggered breaks and by directing students to enter and exit through specific doors when they have breaks. Lockers may not be available – students will bring their backpacks into their classrooms and will keep their belongings with them.

Technology

Students will need access to technology regardless of the scenario that will be implemented. To reduce the potential spread of COVID-19, the number of students accessing school-owned devices (e.g., ChromeBooks) while in school will be limited, and all devices will be cleaned frequently. Parents/legal guardians may choose to provide their children with their own devices.

Yellow bus transportation

New safety measures will be in place on all yellow buses. Seating plans will be developed for each route, with siblings seated together when possible. To reduce contact among students, those entering the bus first will proceed to the back; those last to board will sit near the front. High-contact points on buses will be wiped down frequently. As physical distancing may not be feasible on buses, parents/legal guardians may choose to have their children wear a mask that they provide.

Libraries and textbook usage

Where possible, we will rely on digital textbooks, e-books, and other online learning resources. School learning commons will be set up to encourage physical distancing and may not yet be open to students when they return for the new school year. More information will be provided in the Fall.

Field trips

Field trips will be limited to local, low-risk locations.

Playgrounds

We will monitor and adhere to all AHS guidelines for access to playgrounds and for proper hygiene in playgrounds.

Recess/lunch/cafeterias/vending machines

Students will be encouraged to stay at school for lunch. During breaks (recesses/lunches), cafeterias will either be closed or will only offer pre-packaged foods that can be served safely by our staff. As food options will be limited, children are to bring their own lunches and snacks to school. Microwaves will not be available, so students should use their own thermoses for hot food or bring lunches and snacks that do not need to be warmed up. Vending machines will not operate next year.

High schools – four quarters

Instead of the traditional two-semester system, we will switch to a four-quarter system in the Fall. This will allow students to still take their full complement of core and option courses, while making cohorting easier. It will also enable smoother transitions between scenarios should the province make changes to how education is delivered.

Limited visitor access to schools

Only staff, students, and families will be permitted in our schools. Volunteers (including parent/legal guardian volunteers) and other visitors will have limited access until further notice.

Next steps

As I have noted, the government has said it will make a decision regarding its [school re-entry plan](#) by August 1. The plan offers guidance on a wide range of operational issues and will be informed by both Alberta's [Relaunch Strategy](#) and expert advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health. We will be ready for whatever scenario the province mandates, and information concerning our relaunch plan will be posted on both our division's website and all schools' websites shortly after the province has announced its decision.

I realize that you may have many questions. We will continue to keep you informed as we know more. In the meantime, feel free to reach out to your child's school if you require clarification or have any questions.

Just as we continue to follow and implement the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and all levels of government, we encourage you to do the same. You can find credible and relevant health and safety information, as well as important updates about COVID-19, as follows:

- [Government of Canada](#): bit.ly/2XXLNc6
- [Alberta Government](#): alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx
- [Alberta Health Services](#): albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx
- [City of St. Albert](#): stalbert.ca/city/eps/preparedness/resources
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#): who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

This continues to be a challenging time for some families. If you need support, please reach out to your local school. You may also access Alberta Education's help-line and email service for parents of students, especially those requiring specialized supports. Call 780.422.6548 (toll-free: 310.0000, followed by the nine-digit phone number), or [send an e-mail](mailto:studentsupport@gov.ab.ca) to studentsupport@gov.ab.ca. Services are available on weekdays, between 8:15 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Fall enrolment

Now is the perfect time to enrol your child in classes for the new school year. I encourage you to submit your child's registration as soon as possible.

If you want your child to ride the bus to and from school next year, please be sure to [apply for bus services](#) by **July 1, 2020**. This deadline ensures that we can plan transportation routes and pick-up/drop-off times that will work for your child and all students. More information is available [here](#).



Online Summer School

As is the case in other school jurisdictions in Alberta, GSACRD will offer [summer school](#) in July for students entering grades 9 to 12. We have streamlined our course options, and only online classes will be offered. Due to a recent ministerial decision, diploma exam courses will be offered. As details are confirmed regarding exam protocols, we will communicate how diploma exams will be completed.

Municipal census – Town of Morinville

The Town of Morinville is conducting [a municipal census](#) this year. Census information helps Town Council understand the community and effectively plan for its future. The Town can plan and deliver services for residents who identify themselves in the census survey, so ensuring you are counted is important to help municipal services reach you and your family. Furthermore, many provincial and federal grants are awarded based on the data collected by enumerators. I encourage all of our Morinville households to participate in the census by June 30. Please watch this [short cartoon](#) featuring Mayor Barry Turner explaining the importance of the census for this community.

We encourage you to keep sharing your stories of faith and learning at home, using the hashtags #ABLearnAtHome, #GSACRDproud, and #GSACRDgrace. Please tag GSACRD in your posts, and follow and like us on [Facebook](#) (fb.com/GSACRD), [Twitter](#) (@GSACRD), and [Instagram](#) (@GSACRD_official). You can also [e-mail your stories](#) to us.

We look forward to seeing our students back in the Fall. Until then, I wish everyone a relaxing, enjoyable summer. Stay well.

Sincerely,

David Keohane
Superintendent of Schools