

Regional Executive Director of Education

July 30, 2020

Families,

Last week, the province released the Nova Scotia *Back to School* plan, based on consultation and advice from Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health and pediatricians at the IWK Health Centre, the NSTU and other educational partners.

Hearing from the health professionals, we know that the best place for children's emotional, social, physical and psychological development is in the classroom with their teachers and peers. We also planned the opening given the current very low presence of COVID-19 in Nova Scotia.

As of today, children will return to school on September 8. However, it should be noted that Nova Scotia's *Back to School* plan will be responsive to any change in COVID-19 cases in Nova Scotia. If there is a case of COVID in a community or in a school, we will follow the process outlined in the [Public Health Guidelines](#) and take our direction from Dr. Strang and his team at Public Health. They will investigate and advise on the next appropriate steps, including but not limited to closing a school or family of schools and immediate notification of families. Our learning options allow us to move to a blended learning model or at-home learning if directed by Public Health. We will provide a computer to any student who does not have access to one at home.

Keeping People Safe

The ongoing health and safety of students and staff will be top priority. We will be staggering recesses and lunches, cohorting classes in elementary schools, separate exits and entrances, increased signage and reminders about good health practices like frequent hand washing. We are also creating space between students within their classrooms, requiring masks on buses for all students and in common areas for high school students, and are providing PPE and hand sanitizer for our schools. Our plan is responsive and any of our practices can be modified in the event that the epidemiology of COVID-19 changes.

If you have not had a chance to review the plan, you can find it and other associated material, including a list of frequently asked questions, at www.novascotia.ca/backtoschool .

Additional Supports

An additional \$15 million has been allocated provincially to support student mental health needs and learning as students transition back to school, and we implement COVID-19 protocols. To support implementation of the *Back to School* plan, the province just announced an additional \$40 million in funding to purchase more classroom/ instructional supplies, more resources to clean pre-primary rooms, and funds to hire hundreds of new custodians, lunch monitors and substitute teachers across Nova Scotia.

In the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE), the hiring process is underway for additional casual positions including early childhood educators, educational program assistants, substitute teachers, custodians, lunch monitors and before and after school (EXCEL) leaders. If you or someone you know is looking for work, check out our latest job postings at: www.hrce.ca/employment .

Next steps

We know school opening this year will be unlike past openings. Although school routines will be different, students will continue to receive the same quality education, services and supports as before COVID-19. The next step is to develop and implement school-based plans that follow the *Back to School* plan and public health guidelines. Throughout August, school-based and regional staff will be making the necessary changes within schools to welcome students back. In addition to the measures listed above, classrooms are being set up to maximize space and non-essential furniture will be removed or moved aside to allow students to spread out.

We know you have many questions and we will continue to provide region-wide updates as plans are finalized. You can also expect to receive more specific updates from your child’s school in August in preparation for opening. As we head into the long weekend, I want to thank our staff members, students and families for your patience and understanding as we’ve navigated these uncharted times together. Rest assured that we are working hard to ensure all students, staff and families experience a successful start to the 2020-2021 school year. We are excited to welcome everyone back!

Stay well,



Elwin LeRoux,
Regional Executive Director of Education