



Evergreen School Division

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PUBLIC UPDATE #1

August 17, 2020

Dear Community Members,

We are planning for a year like no other. Students, families and staff are anxious about school re-opening and have many questions about the planning and procedures in place to increase safety. Evergreen School Division's Re-Opening Plan (<https://www.esd.ca/Documents/COVID-19/EvergreenReopeningPlan.pdf>) provides information about the detailed and specific safety procedures which have been developed for each part of the school day, from the moment students board the bus, to their arrival and exit from school.

At the direction of Manitoba Education, "*maximizing in-class learning while maintaining a focus on safety and reducing the risk of transmission is the goal of the upcoming school year.*" All procedures in Evergreen's School Re-Opening and Return to Learning Plan have been developed based on the direction provided by Public Health and Manitoba Education.

Based on the physical space in our schools, and the resources and safety procedures in place:

- **All K-12 students can return to in class learning for the usual amount of time.** Due to careful planning regarding use of school space, it will not be necessary in Evergreen to limit high school in-class time to 50%, as is the case in other communities.
- It will be necessary to delay the start of Junior Kindergarten to late in the year. This program will be revisited in the new year to assess the potential for a spring start.
- Other programs are also delayed for semester one: choral, middle years explorations, shared campus courses, and home economics (foods).
- Instrumental band may be delayed or limited pending additional public health clarification. Other aspects of the music curriculum will be emphasized. Playing instruments at home will continue to be part of assigned music learning.
- Field and sports trips are cancelled indefinitely.
- Transportation will only be provided for eligible students (greater than 1.6 km to the catchment area school). Parents are encouraged to transport their children as often as possible. Please let us know if you do not require transportation.
- Public access to schools will be strictly limited. Community use of schools is suspended indefinitely, and only essential visitors for student programs/ services will be permitted at the discretion of the Principal.

All of the direction provided by Public Health is included in this plan, including Manitoba Education's list of what to expect when welcomed back to school.

1. Physical distancing will be practiced to the fullest extent possible in all parts of the school throughout the school day. This will include (but is not limited to): controlling the way students enter and exit the school at designated entrances, one-way or marked hallways, leaving space between desks and tables, staggering start and end-times for recess and lunchtime, timetabling to avoid spares, and limiting bathroom occupancy at any given time.
2. Where two metres physical distancing is not possible, students will be in distinct cohorts (groups), separate from other students, to reduce the risk of virus transmission throughout the school day.
3. Masks offer an added layer of protection. Students in Grade 5 and above, as well as teachers and staff, are strongly recommended to wear a non-medical mask in common areas throughout schools and when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Younger students can wear masks too.
4. Masks will be required when on school buses for all students in Grades 5 and above. Boarding and exiting the bus will be done with physical distancing and assigned seats.
5. Extra masks will be made available at all schools and on our buses throughout the school year for those who do not have their own.
6. Extra handwashing and sanitizing stations will be set up and monitored to ensure students utilize them.
7. Special attention will be paid to younger students to ensure they follow all safety procedures, such as wearing a mask where required or strongly recommended and keeping their hands washed and sanitized.
8. All parents will be reminded regularly that students must stay home when sick or exhibiting any symptoms of a cold, flu, or COVID-19.
9. Increased cleaning and disinfecting will occur around the school and throughout the day, especially high touch surfaces.
10. Any incident of COVID-19 in a school will result in immediate contact by Public Health with instructions if that student and/or cohort must self-isolate, if they need to be tested and when they can return to school.

Some may believe these measures are too restrictive, and others may take the position that not enough is being done. Our path forward is to follow the direction of public health. As has been true for the length of the pandemic, there will be challenges and changes ahead. Although we do not yet have all the answers, there are compassionate and dedicated people in our schools, at the division, and at the provincial level working to implement the layered safety protocols directed by Public Health. As additional health direction is provided, our practices will be adjusted. We will remain open to your feedback and questions to make our plan more clear. A link to our re-opening survey is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/D5VQWZ6>

Dr. Roussin, Manitoba's Chief Public Health Officer stated that masks are "strongly recommended." In answer to a question about masks being mandated, he stated "an expectation that Manitobans to follow the strong recommendation." Further, Dr. Roussin did not rule out that mask use may be mandated in the future. In order to support student use of masks in school, parents are asked to consider having their child(ren) practice mask use before school re-opens.

As part of additional communication to school divisions on the afternoon of August 17th, Manitoba Education advises, *"As we prepare to welcome students back, we do so knowing that plans may change based on the advice of public health at that time, as well as over the days and weeks that follow. Contingency plans will be put in place for various health situations, which may also vary across the province. Three response levels will be used: Level 1: in-class learning (planned for September, 2020); Level 2: Blended Learning and Level 3: Remote Learning."*

The Evergreen School Division Board of Trustees has supported our planning with guidance and resources. Schools will be provided with increased custodial and supervisory staff, additional supplies and furnishings for students, cleaning/sanitizing materials, and masks and other PPE. Modified and supplemental bus routes are also in development to meet the challenge of transporting our students with fewer seats available on the bus.

This guide will not answer all the questions that students, families and staff will have, but it is a comprehensive summary of our planning to date. Next week, Principals will send letters to parents with further school specific information (i.e. school entry/exit, cohorts, recess, etc.). Shortly thereafter, our transportation department will follow up with families regarding route information. Our school office staff will be back to work the week of August 31st to answer your calls and email. Visitors are not permitted to enter our schools at this time.

It has always been true that our schools are a reflection of the communities we live in. With the intention of being caring to one another, and with vigilance to the public health measures, we will respond effectively together.

Sincerely,

Roza Gray
Superintendent and CEO