

## **August 7 Principal Update: Change of School Return Date and Return to School**

In this update, I'd like to provide some information on **a change to the return to school date and on matters associated with return to school**

### **Return to School**

**School start date for students has been delayed until Thursday, August 20<sup>th</sup>.** You are likely aware that on Tuesday of this week (August 4<sup>th</sup>) the Assistant Deputy Minister, David Wipf, announced that all Whitehorse students would return to school on August 20<sup>th</sup> rather than August 19<sup>th</sup>. Rural schools were similarly advised to do the same and to seek School Council approval for the delay. Yesterday, our Council approved this request and this has now been supported by our superintendent, Chris Stacey.

The reason for this is that each school is required to prepare a COVID-19 Health and Safety Re-entry to School Plan for Yukon Government approval, which is in turn shared with the community on August 12<sup>th</sup>. The plan addresses a large number of details not limited to but including:

- (1) the school entrances and exits for grades,*
- (2) areas of accessibility within the school*
- (3) hallway and movement expectations*
- (4) hygiene practices,*
- (5) suggestions for classroom organization,*
- (6) protocols for lunches and recesses,*
- (7) protocols for monitoring student health,*
- (8) protocols for specialist classes*
- (9) protocols for field excursions*
- (10) protocols for other than students- parents, carers, Elders, itinerant guests – coming into the school*
- (11) procedures that will be used to ensure student well-being is being monitored.*

Although the plan has been developed over the summer (it's about 35 pages in length), it is essential that all details of the plan are presented to and discussed with staff, and staff are professionally competent and confident in enacting these protocols, especially the hygiene protocols.

Because of the expectations associated with the COVID-19 requirements, an additional Professional Learning Day has been requested and now granted, similar to most all Yukon schools. Schools are granted 5 PLDs per year, and this means that two of our days at RSS are devoted to this preparation. We appreciate the support we have received for this from School Council. I have contacted Little Blue Daycare and Tr'inke Zho of the delayed start as this likely

impacts on childcare for some families. This delayed start may impact on the Kindergarten staggered start dates, and Mrs Betts will keep you informed.

### **Matters Associated with Return to School**

As mentioned, our school reference to **tëk'ätr'ënocha (taking care of each other)** will become a greater necessary reality this year, and there'll be several levels this will need to play out - individual, classroom, teams (k-3, 4-7 ,8-12), school and school-community wide. As we've worked on the re-entry plan, this has guided our decision making around routines and protocols.

**In brief, staff members and parents/ carers are very comfortable with high to moderate interaction among teaching staff and students at the classroom level, moderate interaction amongst grade levels in K-4, 5-7 and 8-12, and limited interaction at the whole-school level.**

This would mean that at a grade level, students would be working individually, in pairs or table groups, but there would be limited movement, a seating plan, and restricted resource sharing within the classroom. When the class transitions from recess or another class, sanitizing would be required.

**We are using a 'red', 'yellow' and 'green' approach to consider areas and classrooms of higher risk, because of their size or the varied traffic that occurs**

I now list some important things that parents, cares and students have been asking and are included in the plan:

1. Parents in the K-4 area are not allowed to wait in the school to collect their children after school; students will be escorted to the appropriate exit door to meet their carers/ parents;
2. Field Trips, including overnight trips, are allowed, with assurance health and safety protocols;
3. There will likely be some adjustment in our largest classes to allow for smaller group of the classroom to allow for improved social distancing. Other teaching staff will be supporting these grade levels in these situations;
4. Extra-curricular activities are allowed, and user-groups can use the gymnasium, a again with assurance health and safety protocols;
5. Grades 8-12 classes will not be restricted to one classroom for their instruction; students across the school will continue to go to specialist classes;
6. Health and safety concerns are greater for our higher risk areas – such as the Library, Office area, and Music and Art, Gym, and Foods room – and these are areas where movement and hygiene practices need greater assurance, and;
7. Some students and staff will be wearing masks as a priority, and there will be areas in the school, where students and staff will be highly recommended and even required to wear a mask. Hopefully arrive for August 20<sup>th</sup>! We will work to provide masks for

students, but we encourage your child to have a mask or lower- face covering (in a zip-lock bag) for use at school on August 20<sup>th</sup>.

8. There is restriction in movement through the school, and we understand this will be a source of frustration for all. Each area has a defined entry and exit point, and for Grades 7-12 this is only the front entrance. The K-4 downstairs area and 5-7 area upstairs and a portion of the Grade 8-12 upstairs area are 'no-entry' areas for other Grade levels

**Several parents have asked what I think we are most anxious of. How can we assure, as a school, that we all are making wise decisions in advance of the school year to ensure we aren't putting others at risk. The highest emphasis was on being conscious of our decisions and how we are individually accountable for making decisions that do not put ourselves or others at risk. We all have a part to play in tēk'ātr'ēnocha.**

Parents and caregivers should assess their children for symptoms before sending them to school All students and staff should stay home if they:

- have any symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious respiratory disease, OR
- travelled outside of British Columbia, Northwest Territories or Nunavut in the last 14 days, OR
- had close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have been directed to self-isolate by Yukon Communicable Disease Control.

Parents and caregivers should keep their children at home if they are displaying symptoms. To help assess symptoms, parents can use the [COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) or contact a health care provider for additional guidance.

Students can return to school when they are symptom free or if a health care provider has cleared them to return to school.

Staff should assess themselves daily for symptoms. Staff should stay home if they are experiencing symptoms until a health care provider has cleared them to return to school.

Comments from the staff and school-community have confidence in the school's ability to collectively action and monitor protocols to assure confidence in us all and reduce anxiety. The main message that arose from the conversations was the need for a collective approach to responding as a school-community to the pandemic. **It's our view that the major preparation that is necessary in advance of school return is having open communication to consciously/mentally prepare in an effort to reduce anxiety through a confidence that we are working to take care of each other being mindful of concerns.**

Brian

