

Jan 17, 2022

To: ADM Ryan Sikkes,

Cc: DM Nicole Morgan, Superintendent Donna Miller-Fry, Klondike MLA Sandy Silver, Brian Lewthwaite (RSS Principal), Caley Boulter (TH Education Director)

We are writing to you with our concerns, as RSS School Council, regarding the decision to discontinue covid exposure notices at Robert Service School in Dawson.

We understand that in-person learning is preferable to remote learning and we appreciate the Dept. of Education and the CMOH's efforts to keep schools open and functioning as safely as possible during the covid pandemic.

We also understand that due to the rapid spread of Omicron, the covid infection rate in Whitehorse has increased beyond the capacity to test all symptomatic people and therefore low risk symptomatic people are no longer able to be tested or tracked which means that there is no longer the ability to issue specific covid exposure notices at Whitehorse schools in the way it was happening in the past. We therefore understand the decision to switch to a surveillance method of tracking school absenteeism due to illness in Whitehorse. We also understand that, up to now, CMOH tracking shows that most covid infection in students and staff have originated in the community, not from the school.

However, in Dawson our situation is not the same as in Whitehorse. Our covid case count has not overwhelmed our capacity for testing. Symptomatic people are able to receive PCR testing in Dawson. Therefore, we strongly believe that covid exposure notices for RSS are still possible and should continue for as long as this is feasibly possible in our community. These school exposure notices are valuable to our school community. They aid in letting our school community know that all is being done to keep our school as safe as possible for our students and staff. They provide valuable information to those in our school community who are at higher risk of severe disease from Omicron (such as students and staff who are immunocompromised or live with an immunocompromised person) as these people have to weigh the risk/benefit ratio on an on-going basis of being in the school.

We have heard from our school community that, despite the current operational plan in place, there is an increasing lack of confidence that the school is a safe place to be in light of Omicron. The decision to discontinue covid exposure notices for RSS in Dawson is further undermining this confidence. As confidence decreases, more families may choose to keep their children home which leads to more absenteeism and a diminishing of in-person learning which we all agree is preferred over remote learning for a multitude of reasons.

We encourage further measures to increase safety at RSS, beyond the current operational plan, to keep the most vulnerable in our community safe, given the increased transmission rate of Omicron.

We encourage you to supply N95 masks for RSS staff. N95 masks for adults and youth are not available in our community and it is difficult to find credible N95 masks online, especially in

youth sizes. If it is possible to make these available more broadly to our school community, this would be of benefit.

We encourage you to supply rapid home antigen testing kits to staff at RSS. Rapid antigen home testing kits are not available in Dawson. Understanding their limitations, they become an extra tool for staff who wish to do regular asymptomatic screening such as is currently available for the staff at TH.

Thank you for mandating mask use at the school, including in the classroom. However there remain times of higher risk of Omicron transmission when many students are congregating in indoor spaces at school where distancing is not possible and masks cannot be worn, such as lunch hour, or where masks are not mandated to be worn, such PE classes and Open Gym.

We understand that the mechanical ventilation system at RSS does not allow for the addition of HEPA filters and that Property Management is doing the best they can with the equipment in place to manually maximize the amount of fresh air exchange at RSS that the system and the outside temperature will allow. We understand that, coincidentally, the mechanical ventilation system is up for a re-haul in the near future.

In summary:

As Dawson's testing capacity has not yet been overwhelmed by our covid case numbers, we request that, for RSS, school exposure notices be re-instated and continue to be given as they have been in the past, for as long as this is feasibly possible in our community. We also request that the Dawson covid situation be used to inform these decisions for Dawson, not the Whitehorse covid situation.

Using school surveillance, can you please inform us: What is the percentage threshold that a class absenteeism due to illness would trigger an exposure notice or an exposure action and what would that action be?

Please provide N95 masks for RSS staff. Is it possible to provide access to adult and youth sized N95 masks for RSS students, as they are not available in Dawson and credible youth sized N95 masks are very difficult to access online?

Please make home rapid antigen test kits available for RSS staff who desire the ability to do regular asymptomatic screening.

Please consider mandating mask wearing during indoor PE classes and Open Gym activities to minimize the risk of omicron transmission during these times.

Please support RSS in whatever they might require (such as ability to have additional staff to supervise lunch hours) in order for RSS to maximize spacing between students during lunch hour when they are unable to wear masks.

We will be writing a separate letter to Property Management in Dawson encouraging that HEPA filters be added to the upgrade when the ventilation system at RSS is over-hauled so that RSS will be better protected against the spread of viruses in the future. We hope that you will support this request.

We look forward to hearing back from you as soon as possible.

Many thanks,
Robert Service School Council