

Our Ref. 118902 - Minister Mark letter to all PSI Board Chairs = COVID Leadership & Premier's announced Province's Restart Plan

From: Minister, s.15
s.15

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Sent: May 7, 2020 11:38:20 AM PDT

Attachments: image001.gif, 118902 - Minister Mark letter to all PSI Board Chairs = COVID Leadership & Premier's announced Province's Restart Plan.pdf

Please find attached a letter from Honourable Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, regarding the importance of our public post-secondary education system in supporting B.C.'s economic renewal.

Office of the Minister
Honourable Melanie Mark
Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training
Ph: (250) 356-0179



Our Ref. 118902

May 7, 2020

Dear All Post-Secondary Institution Board Chairs:

Thank you for your tremendous leadership in guiding your Post-Secondary institution through these extraordinary times. You have risen to the challenge with compassion and innovation. I would like to express my gratitude for your board members' and president's leadership in pivoting and expediting safe and alternative forms of delivery to allow students to be successful in completing their end of term studies.

Yesterday, May 6, 2020, the Premier announced the Province's Restart Plan toward "a new normal". Each sector has been tasked to develop a plan to safely re-start operations and to begin the work of rebuilding the economy while maintaining a flat COVID-19 transmission rate - all based on evidence and advice from the Provincial Health Officer. This plan will play a key role in signaling the importance of our public post-secondary sector in supporting B.C.'s recovery. It is imperative that we maintain the safety of your students, faculty and employees to achieve our collective goal of delivering quality, world-class education and training. We must ensure that students are equipped to enter the workforce quickly once they complete their studies.

While this work is underway, British Columbians expect our institutions to collaborate and communicate with learners, faculty, employees and indigenous communities in your region as you develop your institutional plans for summer, fall and beyond. In this time of so much uncertainty it is more important than ever for learners to hear consistency in messaging, and for them to have a sense of confidence and safety as they start, continue or re-engage on their learning journey.

It is critical for British Columbians to hear that their post-secondary system is open and will continue to provide quality, world-class education and training and the support they need to make impactful workforce connections. I believe that investing in the advanced education and skills training of our people is one of the most important actions we can take to ensure British Columbians can fully contribute to our economic recovery and securing our economic future.

As the Premier said, we will do this together, slowly, safely. I know that by working together we will get through this and build back better a stronger Public Post-Secondary and Training eco-system for all British Columbians.

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I look forward to engaging with you in the coming weeks and hearing your ideas about how we can best support the ongoing success of learners in British Columbia.

Respectfully,



Melanie Mark
Hli Haykwhl W̱ii X̱sgaak
Minister

pc: All Post-Secondary Institution Presidents

Shannon Baskerville, Deputy Minister
Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training

Kevin Brewster, Assistant Deputy Minister
Finance, Technology and Management Services and Division Responsible for Student Housing
Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training

Bindi Sawchuk, Assistant Deputy Minister
Workforce Innovation and Division Responsible for Skills and Training
Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training

Jeff Vasey, Assistant Deputy Minister
Post-Secondary Policy and Programs and Division Responsible for Learner Support
Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training

Tony Loughran, Executive Lead
Governance, Legislation and Corporate Planning Division
Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training

Our Ref. 124018 - Letter to Post-Secondary Institution Board Chairs

From: Minister, AEST AEST:EX <AEST.Minister@gov.bc.ca>
Sent: January 21, 2022 3:40:22 PM PST
Attachments: 124018 - Letter to Post-Secondary Institution Board Chairs.pdf, 1219189 PSI safe return to campus.pdf

Resending with correct attachments. Attached is a signed letter from the Honourable Anne Kang, Minister.

Office of the Minister
Honourable Anne Kang
Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Ph: (250) 356-0179



January 21, 2022
Our Ref. 124018

Dear Public Post Secondary Board Chairs:

I am writing in support of the attached letter of January 21, 2022, addressed to all public post-secondary institution presidents from Dr. Bonnie Henry, British Columbia's Provincial Health Officer, strongly recommending the continuation of on-campus instruction.

I am deeply grateful for the hard work done by everyone in the post-secondary sector in following and supporting public health guidance and campus-level health and safety protocols. I acknowledge and appreciate your commitment to providing high-quality post-secondary education during the ongoing uncertainties created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As detailed in the letter from Dr. Henry, based on experience in British Columbia and internationally, educational settings are lower-risk settings for COVID-19 transmission. Further, evidence suggests that the adverse mental health effects resulting from limiting on-campus instruction pose a serious threat to students. I am grateful for your leadership in supporting students to resume and receive the lasting benefits from full on-campus learning. I am also pleased that 24 of our public post-secondary institutions will be providing full campus learning and services by January 24, 2022 and acknowledge the importance of updating institutional business continuity plans to support the continuity of learning, instruction, and research.

Thank you again for your leadership and your ongoing dedication to helping students, faculty, and staff realize post-secondary education's full experience and benefits during these challenging and extraordinary times.

Sincerely,

Honourable Anne Kang
Minister

Enclosure

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pc: Public Post-Secondary Presidents

Shannon Baskerville, Deputy Minister
Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training

Max Blouw, President
Research Universities' Council of BC

Ruth Wittenberg, President
BC Association of Institutes and Universities

Colin Ewart, President
BC Colleges



1219189

January 21, 2022

Dear Post-Secondary Institution Presidents:

Thank you for your continued collaboration with Public Health for a safe return to campus this winter. I appreciate the challenging circumstances many of you are navigating and I commend you for addressing the educational needs of students as well as safety and business continuity considerations at your institutions. As we have discussed, it remains important that we continue to guide our pandemic response based on the epidemiology of SARS-CoV2 and to balance the risk of COVID with the negative impacts of public health measures.

Our post-secondary guidance reflects this need to implement effective prevention measures and avoid ineffective measures that provide little health benefit, and may cause significant disruption as well as adversely affect health and well-being. The rapid spread of the Omicron variant to become dominant in BC was associated with changes in the epidemiology including a shorter incubation period. At the same time, this variant is associated with a significantly reduced risk of serious illness and hospitalization particularly in people vaccinated with two doses of vaccine. Much, however, remains the same in terms of risk settings and measures to prevent spread and we continue to see lower risk in structured seated settings. Given as well the disproportionate adverse impacts of the pandemic on our young adults in the context of a highly vaccinated population, I urge you to prioritize on-campus instruction whenever possible.

Our advice strongly recommending the continuation of on-campus instruction at post-secondary institutions is rooted in the goals of pandemic response, which are to reduce serious illness and death, protect the health care system and minimize societal disruption. Vaccination continues to be proven to be the single most effective intervention for reducing the burden of illness related to COVID-19. Epidemiological data from BC shows that being unvaccinated is the strongest risk factor for severe illness requiring hospitalization or critical care. We see an impressive 27-fold reduction in rates of critical care admissions in the fully vaccinated compared to the unvaccinated populations. Analyses of BC's hospitalization data further demonstrate that the vast majority of the post-secondary community, including faculty and staff, are at a very low risk of hospitalization due to COVID-19.

We continue to see lower rates of COVID-19 incidence in the post-secondary population, and this reflects the high vaccination rates and comprehensive safety measures in place. In contrast to the controlled nature of classrooms and offices, SARS-CoV-2 transmits most efficiently in homes and unstructured or informal social settings. Public Health investigation has found that when a post-secondary student or employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the exposure was most often associated with their home or social setting, and they have not generated forward transmission in the classroom or office environment. Indeed, spending fewer hours in structured settings may paradoxically increase time spent in unstructured settings

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Ministry of Health

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that are at higher risk of transmission. Therefore, we recommend that non-educational and social gatherings that bring staff and students together outside of educational activities follow current public health guidance.

The vast majority of post-secondary students and staff have stepped up and received their vaccinations. While transmission can occur in any setting, high immunization rates and sector-wide measures such as masking in the post-secondary communities have enabled a lower risk environment in support of in-person instruction. The primary concern with the Omicron variant is the potential for faculty, staff, and students to be absent for short periods of time due to illness. Therefore, it is important for your institutions to periodically review and update your business continuity plans.

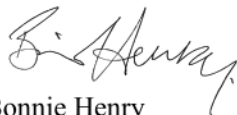
Limiting on-campus instruction, on the other hand, has been associated with significant negative consequences for post-secondary students, who reported significantly poorer and worsening mental health outcomes and greater negative impacts than other British Columbians. Students and families are concerned about missing out on enriching experiences of post-secondary education. Indeed, many are distressed during this key developmental stage in their lives.

The experience post-secondary institutions across BC have with successfully returning to on campus learning in the fall of 2021 should guide our return in 2022 and indeed 17 institutions have resumed on campus learning already. We have the tools to effectively manage cases and outbreaks of COVID-19 if and when they occur and to continue to provide the essential educational and research experiences that students, staff and faculty need.

Public health remains committed to providing evidence-informed advice to manage COVID-19. We expect that COVID-19 will transition from a pandemic to an endemic state over the coming months. Our epidemiological data shows that we are past the peak of the current wave in terms of community transmission, and hospitalizations are plateauing. New variants will undoubtedly emerge as SARS-CoV-2 continues to circulate globally. We will continue to monitor for emerging evidence and continue to offer a preventive approach that supports the best public health outcomes for students, staff, and faculty. I encourage you to promote vaccination and other prevention measures outlined in the COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Guidelines as well as your institutional communicable disease prevention plan among your faculty, staff, and students. These measures have been effective at preventing COVID-19 in a wide variety of post-secondary settings and will continue to support successful on-campus instruction.

Thank you again for the ongoing collaboration with Public Health and your efforts to enable on-campus education. I am grateful for the tremendous contribution from your membership to the economic, social, and cultural well-being of our province, and the health and wellbeing of our young generation in particular.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer

Cc Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Shannon Baskerville, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Max Blouw, President Research Universities' Council of BC
Ruth Wittenberg President, BC Association of Institutes and Universities
Colin Ewart, President BC Colleges
Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
Chief Medical Health Officers, Regional Health Authorities
Chief Medical Officer, First Nations Health Authority
Deputy Provincial Health Officers