

Ministry of Education

Case Study – Safely Returning K-12 students back to class

On Tuesday March 17 Premier Horgan, along with Education Minister Rob Fleming and Finance Minister Carole James announced the temporary closure of BC's public schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The provincial state of emergency starts the following day.

Timeline

- March 30 - Teachers return to work; post-spring break education plans unclear.
- April 8 - School for children of essential workers open.
- April 14 - Education Minister says schools to re-open before end of school year.
- April to early May: More schools re-open for students.
- May 6 - Premier announced B.C.'s Restart Plan. As part of this, on June 1 K-12 education moved from Stage 4 to Stage 3, with most to receive in-class instruction part time on alternating days. Plan needed Cabinet approval.
- May 15 - Premier and Education Minister announce all children may return to classrooms on a part-time, voluntary basis beginning June 1, still following safety plans.
- Two petitions also started circulating – one entitled "Keep BC Schools Closed until Sept 2020" receiving more than 35,000 signatures, the other, "Advocate for Respect for Mask Wearing in school" calling for children and school staff to be respected if they wear masks.
- June 1 - Ministry of Education announce more than 157,000 kindergarten to Grade 12 students — or nearly 30 per cent of all students in those grades — went back to school. Social media posts are mostly positive.
- June 3 – BCTF tweets a call on school districts to provide masks to school staff.
- June - Government involves all 60 school districts and education partners on a coordinated approach. The Ministry is also meeting weekly with parent advocacy organizations to share information, gather input to help guide policies and best practices – and to identify district level issues impacting parents and students, so they can be addressed.
- On June 16, 2020, the BCTF reported that they had passed a motion to be a participant in the government Planning Committee and have broad representation on the committee including representatives from numerous BCTF committees, such as music teacher and gym teachers.
- June 25 - Last day for students before summer.
- July/August: A Steering Committee and working groups are created that includes representatives from teachers, support staff, superintendents, parent groups, First Nations, Metis and the Ministry. Guidelines to be developed with individual plans required for each District.
- July 29 - Education Minister announces K-12 schools are scheduled to begin the 2020/21 school year under Stage 2 of the province's K-12 Education Restart Plan. BCTF expresses concerns.

- Aug. 11 - Government announces that teachers return to class Sept. 8 with students returning Sept. 10.
- Aug. 17 - BC school mask policy revealed all staff and students in B.C. middle and secondary schools will have to wear masks in areas where physical distancing cannot be maintained. BCTF expresses concern.
- Aug. 26 - Final school district plans revealed. BCTF asks government to slow down and get it right.
- Sept. 3 - Education Minister announces \$242 million in federal funding earmarked for reopening B.C. schools will be given to school districts to spend based on their needs.
- Sept 5 – Education Minister releases statement “Sending kids safely back to the classroom”
- Sept 8 – teachers start to return to schools.
- Sept 10 – students start to return to schools.
- September – School attendance reaches 90%.

Background

The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable the approximately 553,000 public school students, 81,000 independent school students, and over 2,200 home-schooled children enrolled each school year, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

The Ministry of Education will make fact-based decisions, while following the direction of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) to ensure the safety of students and staff remains paramount.

The Province fully respects the jurisdiction of First Nations and their right to make their own determination about the re-opening of First Nations schools. The Province also acknowledges the historical impacts of pandemics on First Nations and Indigenous communities and the concerns raised by some First Nations about sending their children back to school in September. School districts have been asked to engage with First Nations and Indigenous peoples on the September restart and incorporate how they will support Indigenous community/parent choices in their Stage 2 plans. School districts and independent school authorities are to be guided by their Local Education Agreements with First Nations, if they have them in place.

Students returned to school in June 2020 as part of Stage 3 of re-opening schools. Stage 3 gave families the option to have K-5 students in classrooms 50% of the time, and students in Grades 6 to 12 could be back in classes 20% of the time. Children of essential service workers were able to attend class full time, and students who continued to stay home remained supported by teachers and education assistants.

Originally Stage 2 would see K-7 students in class five days per week, while Grade 8 to 12 students would be in class two days per week, and the balance of learning would be done online. There would no longer be a choice to learn remotely during time that in-class learning is being offered. However this changed in August and students were allowed to keep their “seat” in a school while learning from home (either on-line or through self directed learning.)

The steering committee included voices of parents (through BCCPAC), teachers, support staff, trustees, school leaders, Indigenous rightsholders and public health officials to look at best practices and find solutions to potential issues to ensure the best start to September as possible.

School districts were asked to prepare a Stage 2 plan and submit it to the Ministry by August 21. This plan will outline how each school district is implementing the new public health guidelines and how they approach creating learning groups at the elementary, middle and secondary school level. School districts and independent school authorities will communicate final information to parents and guardians by e-mail along with updates on school and school district websites by August 26.

STAGE 1 SCHOOL DENSITY TARGETS 100%	STAGE 2 SCHOOL DENSITY TARGETS K-7: 100% Grade 8-12: 40%	STAGE 3 SCHOOL DENSITY TARGETS K-5: 50% Gr. 6-12: 20%	STAGE 4 SCHOOL DENSITY TARGETS K-12: 20%	STAGE 5 SCHOOL DENSITY TARGETS K-12: 0%
In-class instruction: K-12: 5 day per week	In-class instruction: K-7: 5 days per week Grade 8-12: 2 days per week <hr/> 5 days per week available for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Children of essential service workers ✓ Students with disabilities/ diverse abilities ✓ Students who require additional supports <hr/> Remote/online instruction: Balance of learning	In-class instruction: K-5: 2 to 3 days per week Gr. 6-7: 1 day per week Gr 8-12: 1 day per week <hr/> 5 days per week available for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Children of essential service workers ✓ Students with disabilities/ diverse abilities ✓ Students who require additional supports <hr/> Remote/online instruction: <div>Parent/Guardian choice to return to in-class instruction optional</div> Balance of learning	In-class instruction: K-12: Limited <hr/> 5 days per week available for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Children of essential service workers ✓ Students with disabilities/ diverse abilities ✓ Students who require additional supports <hr/> Remote/online instruction: K-12: Majority of all students	In-class instruction: K-12: None <hr/> Suspend all in-class instruction for all grades and students <hr/> Remote/online instruction: K-12: All Students