

August 10, 2020

TO PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN PRESCHOOL, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL

Dear parents:

First of all, I would once again like to applaud the efforts that you have made over the last several months to enable your children to continue their learning, despite the pandemic. When our educational institutions were closed, you were the vital link between the students and the school.

As the summer draws to a close, we hope that you have had an opportunity to spend quality time with your children and loved ones, as well as to have a well-deserved rest.

Back-to-school is already just around the corner. Over the course of the summer, we have worked diligently, with the assistance of the school network, to prepare to welcome your children back to school safely in the fall. These efforts are ongoing.

Before the school year begins, we would like to update you on the conditions that will be in place when students return. These conditions will require both you and your children to make some adjustments.

As you know, all elementary and secondary schools will be open this fall. Students in preschool, elementary school and Secondary I, II and III will be attending classes in person full-time with the standard educator/teacher-student ratios and based on the principle of stable groups. Another option has been provided for students in Secondary IV and V if full-time in-person attendance is not possible. An alternating schedule, where students are in class every second day and complete distance learning and assignments at home, may be used in some schools with health or logistical constraints.

Students in the same group will not be required to comply with physical distancing rules. However, they must remain 2 metres from school staff, with the exception of preschool students. Students must also remain 1 metre from students who are not in their class.

Your children's school will contact you shortly with specific details about what back-to-school will involve for you.

In all cases, the strict health measures established by the public health authorities, such as regular handwashing and frequent disinfecting of rooms, will be followed to avoid potential transmission. Therefore, your children can continue to learn in complete safety.

Stable class groups

The most recent information about the transmission and prevention of COVID-19 in young people under the age of 16 has allowed the public health authorities to relax certain rules that applied to students in preschool, elementary and secondary school. Teachers will not be required to divide their students into subgroups.

Therefore, the following information is important:

- There is no need for “bubbles” of 5-6 students within the same class.
- Students in the same group are not required to maintain a physical distance.
- Physical distancing of 2m between staff and students is to be maintained. This distancing is recommended, but not required, for preschool staff. As a result, preschool staff must wear a face covering at all times, including in classrooms.

Wearing face coverings

Based on the evolution of information about COVID-19, especially regarding transmission in young people under the age of 16, the public health authorities have released new recommendations regarding the wearing of face coverings in schools.

Preschool, elementary and secondary school

Wearing a face covering will not be mandatory for students from preschool to Grade 4, including when using school transportation. Students in Grades 5 and 6 and in secondary school, except for students with a specific medical condition that renders them unable to do so, will be required to wear a face covering in common areas when other class groups are present and when using school transportation. Face coverings will be on the list of supplies to purchase for back-to-school, and it is your responsibility to provide one for your child.

Face coverings are not required in the classroom or in the cafeteria, when students are eating or drinking. Wearing a face covering while at school or when using public transit is not mandatory for students from preschool to Grade 4; however, it is recommended.

It is important to remember that mandatory face coverings for some elementary students and all secondary students do not, in any way, replace or diminish the importance of continuing to follow the other guidelines issued by the public health authorities to decrease the transmission of COVID-19. We are counting on you to ensure that your children wash their hands before leaving for school and upon returning home and to watch closely for any symptoms associated with COVID-19.

We are aware that these health measures may require some adjustments to your daily routine, but it is these changes that will allow us to provide your children with an environment where they can learn and grow safely. Following the guidelines is crucial, and we are counting on you.

Students with specific medical conditions

As you know, the public health authorities do not recommend that students with a specific medical condition that makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19, as confirmed by a physician, return to class in person. In order to ensure that these students continue to learn, your school board or school service centre will offer quality distance education. Your school board or school service centre will contact you in the coming days with more information.

As this is not a recommendation from the public health authorities, and so that everyone can return to school feeling safe and secure, access to this service will be expanded to include students with a parent or close relative with an eligible medical condition residing at the same address, once a doctor's note is provided. However, you are strongly encouraged to allow your children to return to classes in person, if this is possible: after having been isolated for so long, children need to see their friends again and rebuild a direct relationship with a teacher, who not only instructs students, but also inspires them.

Detailed plans in case of another school closure

Despite the fact that no one is hoping for a second wave, it is still important that we plan to provide services should the situation once again deteriorate. Therefore, should schools be forced to close again, students will continue to receive all the support necessary to help them reach their full potential. This includes distance learning courses provided by their teachers, who will continue to work full-time, as well as regular follow-up by the school. A minimum number of hours has been set in order to ensure distance learning. Your school service centre, school board or school will inform you shortly of the details of their emergency protocol. We will all be ready to quickly transition to quality distance learning if the situation unfortunately calls for it.

A clear procedure in case of outbreaks

In order to quickly react in the event of an outbreak, we have also created a clear procedure for schools to follow if a student shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, or if multiple cases are detected in one or more classes. General information on this subject is also available at [Québec.ca/back-to-school](https://quebec.ca/back-to-school).

If a positive case is confirmed at your children's school, you will be notified as quickly as possible, and will continue to be informed of the measures implemented following the report of the case. We are committed to full transparency.

An adapted version of the *Self-Care Guide – COVID-19* was also created to allow parents to make the best possible decisions during the pandemic. This guide includes information to learn more about the symptoms of COVID-19, the basic care to provide to children and information about when to call the coronavirus info-line. The guide will be sent to parents before children return to school and will be available in both French and English on the [Québec.ca/coronavirus](https://quebec.ca/coronavirus) Web page.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you for placing your trust in us, despite these exceptional circumstances. I am a father to two girls, so I know how precious our children are to us and how we want nothing more than to protect them from every possible threat. Rest assured that we are making every effort to make sure that when children return to school, they will be able to socialize, develop and succeed in complete safety. The return to school last spring, which allowed thousands of students to attend class without fuelling the pandemic, has proved that it is possible.

Thanks to your ongoing support and the continuous efforts of school staff, together we can ensure that the return to school is forward-thinking inspiring and, most of all, safe.

Yours truly,

Jean-François Roberge
Minister of Education

Encl.