

Eagle Mountain 'Gradual Transition' Information

I am sending this to all parents to hopefully give you some information about our plans for the Gradual Transition back to school process, for those that have indicated they may need this support...or who are thinking of emailing me for more info!

Here is the info provided by the district: *School-Based Gradual Supports (K-8):*

We understand that some families are concerned about the restart of school and want their child to return to face to face instruction but need some time to gradually return their child to school.

While we would like all students to meet their classroom teacher on Monday, September 14th and to be in attendance, we understand some families may want more time or will be more comfortable with a slower, more gradual start. While schools are unable to provide the same level of flexibility as they did in June (all school-based teachers will be working with students face to face 5 days a week), we do want to provide families the flexibility to start at a pace that matches their family's needs.

School principals will work with families to provide a gradual restart for this September as families require.

The school district is dedicating resources to develop some grade-level learning supports and tutorials that schools can send home to support their child while they transition back into in-class learning. While the materials will not be teacher-specific or necessarily in pace with your child's classroom teacher, they will help support a child's learning.

Parents will need to be able to support their child's learning while they are at home. Your child will retain their school-based classroom placement; and, on the days and times that your child attends school, they will participate in the classroom/learning group. The amount of parental time needed to support your child is proportional to the amount of time your child attends classes.

The goal will be to increase your child's classroom time as families' situations evolve. While this is a short-term solution, it does provide families more time to transition back to regular school or to make other educational arrangements that better match their family needs.

Supports would be mostly in English and based on the B.C. Ministry of Education curriculum. Therefore, parents in language-based programs would need to ensure that their child's language skills regarding the program of choice they are in, are fostered while they are learning at home. A gradual return will not impact a child's language skills but a long-term prolonged absence from a program of choice would require families to reassess enrolment in a program of choice, as language acquisition is the core foundation of the program.

Parents would work with their school principal and classroom teacher to develop a timeline for their return. Families would need to inform the principal of this approach and their desire for a gradual return to maintain their classroom placement.

This approach is not a remote learning program but is rather a way to support a student's self-paced return to regular in-class instruction.

These curricular supports will take time to establish but we hope to have things up and running in mid-September. You would however still inform your school principal now of your plans so we could begin planning.

What does it mean?

To start, over 60 families have contacted me indicating an interest in progressing with the 'gradual transition' back to school process. This would represent about 10% of our students...and likely not completely account for all the parents that are wondering what it is all about.

I think it is clear that some parents felt like the original survey asked them to choose only between a full time return to school or register for an alternative program. This likely felt overwhelming and did not offer flexibility for families that wanted to progress towards a return to school, but cautiously.

It is important for all parents to know that we always seek to work with parents to support the needs of their children. Each child comes with unique needs and challenges and working together as a team is always the goal. Yes, we aren't always able to make completely 'unique' plans for each student – in a school of over 600 students, with a set amount of staff...and time...and policies...sometimes compromise, flexibility and reassessing as we go is the best we can do. The fear of choosing between programs, and losing spots at a school, should not have overshadowed our desire to work with parents and students to help them feel safe, supported and part of the community.

As I said, many parent have contacted me inquiring about the 'gradual transition' process and, although it is hard to meaningfully prepare for the unknown – how will your child feel when they get to school, what will the 'numbers' be in the coming days / weeks, what will the health of my family be as we move forward, the information provided here will hopefully help parents understand how we will respond to specific needs, while also suggesting a possible course for the next two weeks.

What gradual transition is:

- an opportunity for students to cautiously increase their time at the school, while maintaining / building connections specifically to their class (learning group) and homeroom teacher.
- an opportunity for students who might become overwhelmed to know there is a school/district supported process for adjusting and re-evaluating a child's situation.
- a process where students will be working through core curriculum (Math, Language Arts, SEL) at home, likely provided as packages from a district source. Although the connection with their classroom teacher may include access to activities and lessons shared through Teams / One Note, it is important to know the curriculum provided is likely to be different than the work students are doing in class.
- a work from home / work at school option where students will be expected to complete activities and lessons with the help of their parents. As mentioned above, some staff will be able to share classroom-based activities through technology, but the expectation to start is district staff (not necessarily our teachers) creating packages for students to work through.

In other words, gradual transition is not:

- a hybrid or online program where our classroom teachers will teach each subject and include students in online / face to face Office 365 virtual classes / meetings as was done last spring. (If the phase of school re-opening shifts, of course we will shift along with it.)
- a year long program. This is intended as a transitional process for students. It is not necessary for us to have a hard deadline, however it is my understanding that district packages and support will not carry on all year (nor would this be in the best interest of the student).
- a support for students that will be attending school less than full time, due to sports or artistic activities

What are the first steps?

Starting next Thursday, September 10th, students will gradually be introduced to the school setting, safety procedures, staff and classmates. **Our plans for Thursday and Friday will be shared in a separate email attachment.** The hope is that students will come on Thursday and Friday to help them get over some of their stresses, and to start to feel better about the school setting.

On Monday, September 14th, students will enter their homeroom class / learning group. Monday will be a 'regular day' and teachers will be working hard to build community, outline safety and help students get to know their class / learning group and what school will look like for now. **Schedules and further safety protocols will be sent in a separate email attachment.** Please note, all 612 students in our school will be placed in a class by Monday morning, including those who have said they are planning or hoping for a gradual transition to school.

For me, there will be two types of students we will need to support in their gradual return to school:

- a) Students nervous about what to expect and what things will look like: for these students, I recommend trying to start school during the transitional days Thursday-Monday. During these days, everyone will be feeling the same nerves (even principals) and being able to slowly increase the time spent at school (over the three days) may help reduce stress. In my experience as an educator and parent (and personally), although nerves are high at the start of any new activity, worries seem to grow and multiply over time, and the feeling of missing out or being behind can be difficult to overcome and compound the initial anxiety.

All staff will be looking to build connections and trust during the first few days. Being a part of this can be very helpful, and help us all feel that we are connected, have similar feelings to others and part of a larger community.

- b) Parents / Students nervous about virus numbers, safety protocols and what will happen when school opens: In some situations, I know parents would like to take a 'wait and see' approach to the start of school. Attending for the first few days may not feel appropriate or right at this time. For those in this situation, we will reach out to all students / parents through email that have not attended, on Monday Sept. 14th. We will initially provide student passwords and login information to get them connected to their class Teams / One Note info page as quickly as possible.

District created work packages will follow as soon as possible. By the end of the first week, we (class teacher, designated staff member or admin depending on number of students) will reach out to individual parents and discuss options for beginning a gradual transition back to school. We expect to have a district template for such discussions in the coming week and will use this when developing our plans.

In both scenarios, or if there is a combination, the essence of our efforts will be to build trust and relationship and work with you (and your child) to have a safe and healthy return.

What do you need to do?

Every student has the potential of moving into the transitional process depending on how they are doing today, tomorrow and in the weeks ahead. Read the information regarding our first three days of school. We will be providing information to students who are not in attendance on these days, and will follow up directly with parents (through email) for those that do not attend.

