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December 30, 2021

Dear SD43 families,

I hope you have enjoyed the holiday break and are looking forward to celebrating the start of a new year. Unfortunately, 2022 is presenting us with new challenges in the form of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. This variant is highly contagious and is spreading rapidly in communities, particularly among the unvaccinated.

To keep schools open, it is essential to rigorously apply the protocols that have been in place since September and implement or reintroduce additional enhanced measures. To prepare schools so that students may have a safe return to in-class instruction after the winter break, schools will re-open to students on **Monday, January 10, 2022**. The delayed start will allow staff to plan and prepare sites in advance of students' return. The delayed start will also provide the opportunity for more students to attend appointments and receive vaccinations before rejoining school populations. According to the provincial health officer, vaccination remains the best protection against severe outcomes from COVID-19.

All staff will return to work Tuesday, January 4, 2022. During this week, schools will be open for a limited number of children, primarily those of front-line health care workers under age 12, and students with exceptional needs. If your child falls into this category, contact school administration on Tuesday to make arrangements for the remainder of the week. For parents/caregivers of special needs students, please note that bus transportation will not be available Tuesday, as transportation protocols need to be finalized, please contact your school administrator if bus transportation for your child is required.

Guidelines and existing protocols that have succeeded in minimizing the spread of the virus in schools include:

- Encouraging everyone who is eligible, to get fully vaccinated.
- Doing daily health checks and staying home when sick.
- Using available space to spread out and to respect the personal space of others.
- Wearing masks in accordance with the [Provincial Health Officer Order on Face Coverings](#).
- Cleaning hands regularly.
- Cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces at least once a day.
- Ensuring all HVAC systems are operated and maintained as per standards and specifications and are working properly.

Enhanced safety measures include:

- Strategies that prevent crowding during class transition times including staggered start times, recess or lunch times and dismissal times.
- Hold school gatherings and events (e.g., assemblies, etc.) virtually; if they must be in-person, limiting the number of people to no more than 50% operating capacity.
- Holding staff-only gatherings (e.g. meetings, professional development activities) virtually where possible.
- Limiting visitors to those who are supporting activities that directly benefit student learning and well-being (e.g. teacher candidates, immunizers, meal program volunteers, etc.).
- Pausing extracurricular sports tournaments.

To ensure continued alignment with BCCDC direction, an [addendum](#) to the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) has been created. It outlines focused actions and additional prevention measures B.C. public K-12 schools must implement in response to the recent rise of cases of COVID-19 due to the emergence of the more transmissible Omicron variant.

School administrators will be in contact with families regarding details of site-specific safety protocols in the week prior to Monday, January 10. In addition, changes to the Fraser Health Authority notification and contact tracing processes are anticipated.

The health and safety of students, staff and the SD43 community remains a priority and it is imperative that we all make every effort to keep each other safe. With guidelines and protocols in place and followed, schools can continue to operate safely and provide the best possible outcomes for the social and emotional well-being of our students and fulfill their educational goals. Please help us support the children in our community by adhering to the guidelines set forth by the provincial health officer.

Best wishes for a happy and safe new year!



Patricia Gartland
Superintendent/CEO