

September 9, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we are all about to start our journey together for the 2020-2021 school year, I wanted to reach out to express a warm welcome to our families who are new to the school district as well as to those families who will be re-joining us. I've been coming to school every September since I was five years old and I can honestly say that I have never experienced anything quite like this year's September start-up! I imagine many of you are feeling the same way given the circumstances we all find ourselves in. I want to thank you for your patience as our program plans have shifted based on new information from the Ministry of Education. We appreciated the feedback many of you provided that helped shape our planning.

I want you to know that we are excited and ready to welcome your children back into our classrooms. Staff across the district have been working hard to prepare our schools, ensuring that every health and safety expectation contained in the [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings](#) has been met or exceeded and that our schools are safe and welcoming places for our students.

Our school district has taken a number of steps to ensure your children return to schools that are clean, orderly and safe. These, as well as other health and safety measures, are all designed to create a healthy space for your children to come to school in each day:

- The district recently hired a large number of additional custodians to increase our cleaning capacity in schools.
- A large number of extra handwashing stations have been purchased for classrooms and portables with no running water, and regular hand-washing will be a frequent part of daily routines.
- Every student and staff member will participate in a detailed health and safety orientation during the first week of school
- Every student and staff member will be expected to participate in a mandatory health declaration process before coming to school/work every morning to ensure that no one enters the building who is exhibiting specific symptoms of illness, has been outside of Canada in the past 14 days or has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- Every student and staff member will be given two re-usable face masks and anyone is welcome and encouraged to wear a mask at any time while at school. The district recognizes that this is a family decision, however in specific situations, such as in secondary school hallways, public health experts have made it clear that students and staff must wear a mask.
- Physical distancing and traffic flow in schools will be managed carefully through directional signage, staggered start and end times and movement of classroom furniture.

Teachers and educational support staff have already been hard at work preparing for what, in some cases, will be new and different ways of teaching both in-person and remotely. It is important to note that some things will look and feel the same in our classrooms and some may feel quite different, especially at the beginning of the school year. Our teachers have been asked to take on the challenge of teaching in a very new and complex environment and it will likely take some time for some students and staff to become accustomed to new ways of doing things. Just like you, teachers and other staff want what is best for your children but things may take some time to get to where we would like them to be. We appreciate your patience and kindness as our teaching staff work through the many challenges they have been given.

For those of you who have chosen to have your child be involved in one of our remote transitional programs, I invite you to stay in close touch with your child's school while they learn from home. It's important to us that we not lose the critical connection between the school and your family. When *you* are ready, we will be ready to welcome your child back into the school. We understand the decision-making process and timeline will look different for each family, but want you to know that our goal is to have every one of our students feeling safe to return to school to join their teachers and classmates in-person. It's difficult to match the connections and warmth that occur in a physical classroom amongst the teacher and students. Towards the end of September, I encourage you to reach out to other parents whose children have been attending in-person so you can hear their thoughts about how things are going. I sincerely believe you will hear positive things.

We know that this is an anxious time for some students and their families. The pandemic has brought about many challenges for families that have sometimes resulted in uncertainty and worry for your children – our students. We want you to know that our school-based staff are here to help. Our goal is to provide a warm and welcoming place where students can return to the school-based supports and routines that may have been missing from their lives for several months. If your child is expressing undue fear or anxiety, please don't hesitate to reach out to your child's teacher, counsellor or principal, who will work with you to determine the best way the school can support them. In addition, a reminder of the link to our webpage containing [strategies to support your child through stressful circumstances](#).

Finally, I choose to take the perspective that everyone, including parents, staff members and students, is doing their best in this difficult situation. We are all being faced with challenges in our lives that may sometimes impact our ability to 'be our best selves'. This situation is new to all of us and given the size and complexity of our school district with over 20,000 students, close to 3000 staff and 1100 classrooms, there may be some bumps along the road as we all navigate these new circumstances together. I appreciate your ongoing patience and willingness to work with your school if there are any issues that need to be addressed along the way in order to support your child. As Dr. Bonnie Henry reminds us, I am hopeful that we can all be calm, be safe and be kind as we work through these first few weeks of school alongside each other. Ultimately, we all want what is best for every one of our students – your children. How we get there may look different than it used to, at least for a while. We will get there together.

The school district will continue to post updates on the district [COVID-19 webpage](#) and schools will continue to share information directly with parents and guardians. I would encourage you to reach out to your child's teacher or school principal if you have any questions.

I want to thank you for the trust you are putting in the Richmond School District and for sharing your children with us. We are grateful for the opportunity to welcome you and your children back and are excited to get started!

I wish you and your families a happy and positive start to the 2020-2021 school year.

Sincerely,



Scott Robinson  
Superintendent of Schools