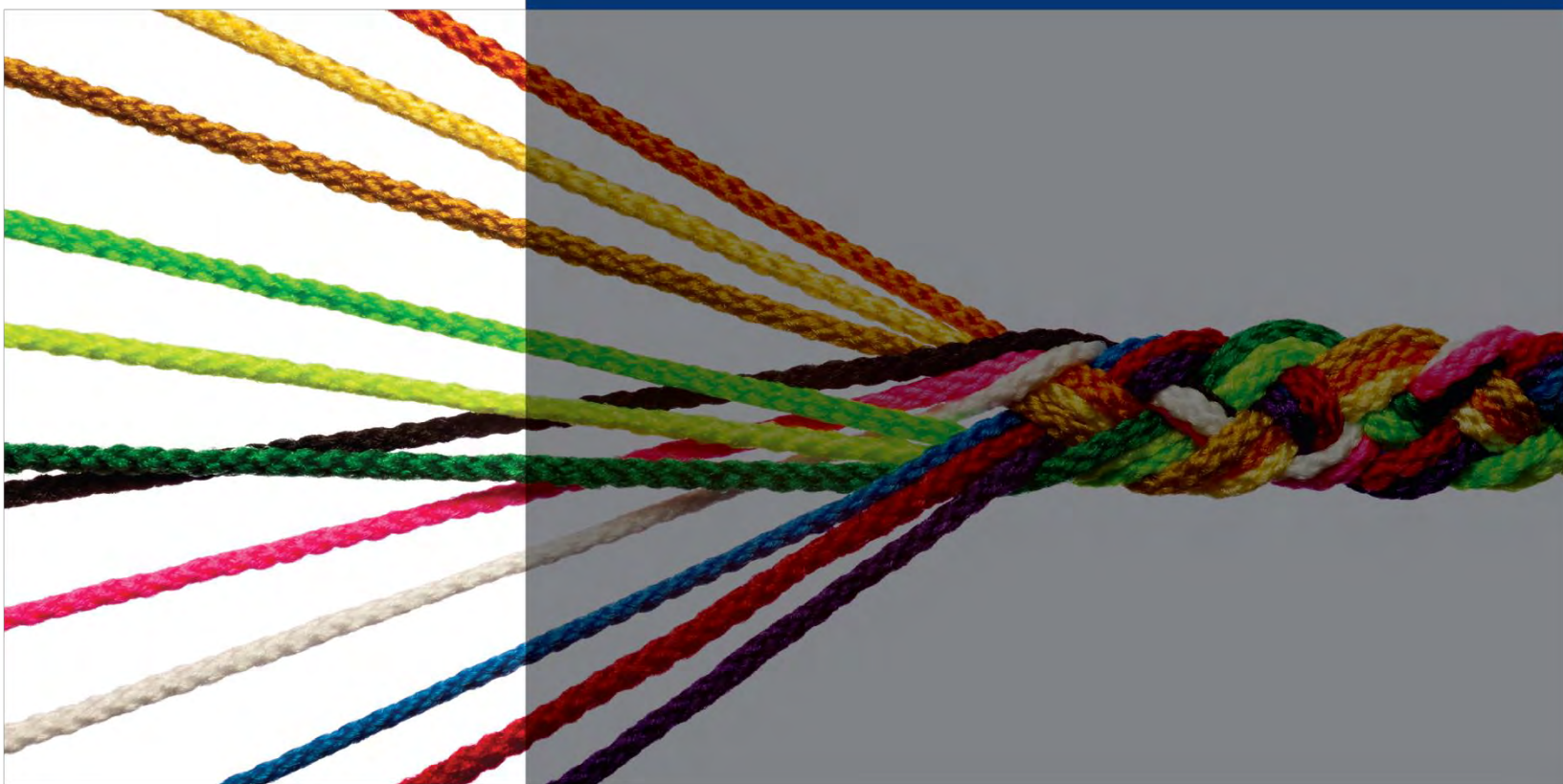


SUPPORTING THE K-12 EDUCATION RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN B.C.



Integrated Planning Framework for School Districts
and Independent School Authorities

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Introduction

School districts and independent school authorities are preparing to provide continuity of educational opportunities for students and other community supports during the current COVID-19 pandemic. This work includes developing plans and using alternative delivery methods to provide curriculum, instruction and assistance to students and families.

The K-12 sector is working under the guidance of public health officials to ensure delivery of educational services and supports in a manner that keeps students, families and staff safe. Consistent application of preventative measures must remain top of mind.

Schools and classrooms are developing flexible and innovative ways to accommodate the needs of each school community. It will be important to ensure that all partners have the common understanding that learning environments and related services will look very different from regular operations. It is also important to acknowledge that local circumstances require different approaches between schools and communities.

It is essential for the Ministry, K-12 education partners, schools/school districts, public health, local governments and community agencies to align their efforts in these challenging circumstances. Coordinating activities, sharing information and resources, and early engagement with all partners will support the implementation of effective approaches locally and across the province.

Purpose

The purpose of this Integrated Planning Framework is to support school districts and independent school authorities in developing plans to deliver educational opportunities and supports during this pandemic event.

The framework clarifies provincial direction and provides general guidance across a number of key topics, and includes links to additional information and resources that can support local decision-making and communications with partners. This document is also intended to serve as a companion piece to the [Ministry's Pandemic Response Framework and Pandemic Planning Guidelines](#).

Given the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the provincial response, the Ministry will continue to update this document with new information, resources and promising practices as they become available.

Context

The Ministry of Education follows the direction of the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer regarding all public health-related issues. On March 17, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and under the direction of the Provincial Health Officer, the Provincial Government directed all K-12 public and independent schools to immediately suspend in-class instruction until further notice.¹

On March 18, 2020, the Provincial Government declared a Provincial State of Emergency to support response to COVID-19. During a Provincial State of Emergency:

- The Provincial Health Officer can make [orders](#) as needed, that the public must follow.
- The Provincial Government can make decisions about the operations of school districts/independent school authorities and the use of school facilities under the *Emergency Program Act*.

School districts and independent school authorities have considerable flexibility in how they deliver educational opportunities and supports in a manner that meets the unique needs and circumstances of their school communities. However, service delivery must operate within current guidance from local and provincial medical health officers. In addition to providing educational services, school districts and independent school authorities have been asked by the Provincial Health Officer to prioritize in-person care for children whose parents/caregivers provide essential services in the community.

Additional legal authorities related to public health and K-12 schools:

- The *Public Health Act* permits a medical health officer to investigate and close a public or independent school in response to a public health hazard.
- The *Public Health Act* requires that prior to making an advisory report public, the medical health officer has to consult the Board of Education and the Provincial Health Officer.²
- A superintendent, independent school authority, or principal may restrict an employee's access to a school or school district site subject to review by a medical health officer when the presence of the employee is believed to pose a danger or risk.

¹ Schools are not closed at this time – it is in-person classroom instruction that is being suspended.

² The Public Health Act does not include provisions regarding consulting with independent school authorities.

Guiding Principles

1. Ensure a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.
2. Provide the services needed to support children of our essential workers.
3. Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
4. Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

Planning and Governance

Planning and Stakeholder Teams

Clarifying roles and responsibilities and engaging key stakeholders at the beginning of the planning process can be critical to the success of service continuity during a pandemic event.

School districts and independent school authorities should establish a **core planning team** of key personnel with clear roles and functions. Membership may include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Senior Management Team
- Human Resources
- Facilities
- Information Technology
- Finance
- Learning/Instruction
- Student Support Services
- School Principal/Head of School representative
- Local/regional emergency planning representative

In addition to clearly defining roles and responsibilities, important considerations for the **core planning team** include establishing primary contacts to liaise with schools and with the Ministry, ensuring each school has designated their own lead contact, and identifying alternates in case original planning team members become ill.

Establishing a separate **stakeholder advisory team** can also help to engage key members of the school community in the planning process, bring in a greater diversity of perspectives to help identify potential issues and opportunities, and support overall implementation. Members may include local union representatives (e.g. BCTF, CUPE), school/district parent advisory council chair, Indigenous community delegates, and other community partner agencies.

Governance

The Emergency Program Act (EPA) authorizes provincial and local levels of government to declare states of emergency and make decisions about the operations of school districts/independent school authorities and the use of school facilities during that time period. If necessary, the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General can override a local government's authority, however the preferred approach is for both levels of government to work together to develop a coordinated response.

The Ministry of Education will work closely with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Emergency Management BC regarding the use of school facilities and communication with boards of education and local governments during the current provincial and local

states of emergency. School districts and independent school authorities are encouraged to contact the Ministry [by email](#) if they are experiencing challenges regarding conflicting direction between provincial and local government authorities.

Within the K-12 sector, coordination of decision-making at the local and provincial levels supports consistency of best practice and making optimal use of limited resources during a pandemic event. Boards of education and independent school authorities should work closely with the Ministry of Education and relevant provincial K-12 education organizations (including but not limited to BCSTA, BCSSA, BCASBO, BCPVPA, BCTF, CUPE, FISA, FNESC, FNSA) to align approaches, and always follow the guidance of their local medical health officers to support the safety of students, families and staff.

Reviewing and updating internal governance processes is another important step in the initial planning phases. Proactive measures involving Board of Education trustees and senior management can help preserve community trust in vital leadership roles and model shifts in practice for the rest of the organization.

Meetings

Boards of education and independent school authorities may wish to conduct meetings via phone or electronic means³, and update relevant policies and bylaws as required. For boards of education, the secretary-treasurer (or another employee designated by the board) must be present at the time that a decision of the board is rendered and must record any decision.

Boards of education may also use video or audio streaming technology to enable members of the public to listen to or watch board meetings.⁴ For the parts of the electronic board meeting designated for public questions and comments, the board could accept questions by phone, email or the chat feature available with some video conference programs.

Additional Considerations for Boards/Authorities

- Review hours of operation for and public access to school/board offices, to help limit potential exposure.
- Ensure school board/school offices continue to follow thorough cleaning and hygiene protocols.
- Follow guidance from the Provincial Health Officer concerning [preventative measures related to COVID-19](#).
- Review information on [community-based measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19](#).

³ The School Act enables a board to allow trustees to participate in or attend a meeting of the board by telephone or other means of communication if all trustees and other persons participating in or attending the meeting are able to communicate with each other. Trustees who attend a board meeting via electronic means are counted for the purposes of establishing a quorum.

⁴ Under the School Act, a board of education can enable members of the public to participate in a board meeting electronically rather than having the public attend a board meeting in-person.

Communications

Development of a clear and comprehensive communications plan is an essential component of service continuity planning. Strong lines of communication between districts/authorities and local schools, and between school administrators and staff and families, can significantly help to reduce stress and increase trust within the school community.

School districts and independent school authorities should develop their communication plans in collaboration with their regional health authority and local schools.

Communication plan components should include:

- Identification of spokespeople for the district/authority (e.g. board chair, superintendent).
- Protocol for screening, directing and responding to media inquiries as quickly as possible.
- Processes and key messages for communicating with parents/caregivers, including those who are homeschooling.
 - Communications should be developed and managed by the district/authority office, not by individual administrators or school staff members, to ensure consistency of messaging.
 - Exceptions include staff communications with parents/caregivers as part of their instructional duties (e.g. student assignments), however clear guidance should be provided to staff regarding sharing information beyond that which pertains to the individual student or class learning dynamic.
 - School district/authority offices may need to respond to inaccurate information circulating in their school community.
- Schedule of communications to parents/caregivers and staff – consider higher frequency (e.g. daily) during the initial phase of the pandemic event, and then shifting to a less frequent but regular schedule thereafter.
- Providing up-to-date information on school/school district websites for parents/caregivers and staff.
- Process for connecting with the regional health authority to review school/district messaging – public statements and communications to parents/caregivers and staff containing public health messaging, including references to confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 within the school community, must be reviewed and approved by the local health authority prior to release.

Best Practices:

- *Liaise with relevant provincial K-12 education organizations, schools/school districts in the region, local health authority and local government to develop message consistency and/or shared communications.*
- *Create dedicated COVID-19 sections on the school/district website for the public and for staff, including Q&As.*
- *Contact the Ministry for support if needed – by email at or by phone at 236-478-2712.*

- Process for keeping the Ministry informed of significant events and associated communications to school communities related to COVID-19. Communications can be directed to the Ministry [by email](#).

Prioritization of Services and Supports

To help sustain provincial pandemic response efforts, school districts and independent school authorities are asked to prioritize in-person care and learning opportunities for children whose parents/caregivers provide essential services in the community, followed by families most in need of support.

Essential Services Workers

The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General has released provincial guidance on what occupations are considered Essential Services and further clarity that education and child care providers should prioritize placements for those children whose parents are employed in:

- *Health and Health Services*
- *Social Services*
- *Law Enforcement*
- *First Responders*
- *Emergency Response*

A key priority in B.C.'s pandemic response plan is to ensure that children of Essential Services Workers (ESWs) are cared for so that their parents can continue to work.

School districts and independent school authorities are being asked to follow the definition of Essential Services above to prioritize services and supports to children of ESWs as follows:

- Tier 1: Health/Health Services, Social Services, Law Enforcement, First Responders and Emergency Response;
- Tier 2: any other occupation on the provincial list of essential services.

For specific occupations under each grouping, please refer to the [provincial list of COVID-19 essential services](#).⁵

"Social Services" includes those providing care to children and care to individuals with disabilities as well as child care workers providing care for ESWs.

Teachers, child care workers and support staff can be considered in this Tier 1 category as part of district/authority planning if they require child care to perform essential duties within the school/district (e.g. care or learning for other ESW children).

School districts and independent school authorities should also take family composition into consideration, as well as the urgency of the need for care - for example, a single parent who is an ESW in Health Services with no child care options may be prioritized above a two-parent family where only one parent is an ESW and there are alternate child care arrangements available.

⁵ Please note that Social Services encompasses the list of occupations under the "Vulnerable Population Service Providers" heading.

School districts and independent school authorities should be reaching out to parents and caregivers to determine child care and educational needs of ESW families in the community.

Supporting Vulnerable Students and Families in Need

If operationally feasible, school districts and independent school authorities should also consider offering priority care to parents/caregivers of students with unique needs (e.g. students with disabilities) and low-income families with no other child care options.

Educational Services vs. Child Care

The Ministry of Education and MCFD are working closely together to ensure that children aged 0-12 of ESWs have access to care, with specific priority for parents/caregivers working in Health and Health Services, Social Services, Law Enforcement, First Responders, and Emergency Response.

School districts and independent school authorities must develop options to ensure both child care support and ongoing learning opportunities are made available for children aged 5-12. School districts/authorities should also try to include children over age 12, if they have an ESW parent who requires care and the child has a disability that precludes them from being able to stay at home independently. If necessary, school districts/authorities can make school-age child care the first priority (finding a space that meets Provincial Health Officer guidelines, and staffed by an ECE, ECE assistants and/or Responsible Adult) and phase in educational instruction over time once local plans are in place for the provision of ongoing learning opportunities to students.

The Provincial Health Officer maintains that onsite child care and educational services can be delivered safely, provided that prescribed public health protocols are followed.

The new COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 provide information on recommended hygiene practices, cleaning & disinfecting procedures, and physical distancing strategies.

To the greatest extent possible, districts/authorities should deliver supports to children of ESWs with existing staff and without having to charge fees.

Hours of care will vary by school/school district but should cover a regular school day plus any time that would have been covered by a before and after school program. School districts and independent school authorities are strongly encouraged, where possible, to work with child care providers and community agencies to make care available for at least 12 hours a day (e.g. 7AM-7PM) or in alignment with ESW shift work in the community.

In situations where the need for priority child care may exceed available capacity, school districts, independent school authorities and child care providers located in the same community should reach out to one another to coordinate care options and increase the number of available spaces.

Early Childhood Care (Age 0-5)

School districts and independent school authorities should refer ESW parents/caregivers who require immediate care options for children age 0-5 to the [MCFD website for information on Temporary Emergency Child Care for Essential Services Workers](#). The website includes a sign-up form⁶ and frequently asked questions.

While the primary focus for school districts and independent school authorities is children aged 5-12, districts/authorities are best placed to assess and address community needs. In many rural/remote communities it may be helpful for schools/school districts to be more actively engaged in early childhood (age 0-5) care on a temporary basis, including working with community partners and non-profit organizations where possible, so that services are coordinated. This response may be needed in smaller communities where local child care operators have temporarily closed, but schools/school districts are not necessarily expected to provide these services on an ongoing basis, especially if local child care operators resume operations in the future.

If school districts/authorities are considering providing early childhood care directly, or through a partnership with another organization, they can work directly with ESW parents/caregivers to offer space if it is available.

Child Care Requirements

School districts and independent school authorities providing child care are required to adhere to maximum hours of care and staff-to-child ratios as per the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#).⁷ The maximum hours of care per day is 13. Allowable staff-to-child ratios for School Age Group Child Care are as follows:

- Kindergarten to Grade 1: One responsible adult for 12 children (max. 24 children per group with two responsible adults).
- Grade 2 and older: One responsible adult for 15 children (max. 30 children per group with two responsible adults).

The information noted above will also clarify requirements for child care being offered to children age 0-5. The Ministry of Education is also working with MCFD and the Ministry of Health on possible options to expedite and streamline child care licensing and access to funding. Information will be shared with school districts/authorities as soon as it is available.

MCFD recently announced [new incentives](#) to keep child care available.

Considerations for School Districts/Authorities

- How many families within the school/school district fit within the Health and Health Services, Social Services, Law Enforcement, First Responders, and Emergency Response categories and may need care?

⁶ ESW parents/caregivers can also call 1-888-338-6622 and select option 4.

⁷ Additional information is also available on the [MCFD website](#).

- What options are there for other essential service workers if Tier 1 occupations are all that the school/school district can accommodate?
- What hours will schools or other centres need to be staffed for parents/caregivers to drop their children off based on the needs of their families?
- What parameters and protocols need to be in place to enable/enforce physical distancing? What process will a district use to identify sites conducive to these requirements?
- Who is best positioned to staff identified sites and what protocols will be put in place to control site access and ensure the safety of staff and students?
- When will learning opportunities be integrated into the scope of services, and who will provide that?
- What enhanced sanitation practices will be in place?
- Is there capacity to partner with a child care provider to offer services to very young children/toddlers of ESWs or children with diverse abilities/disabilities in addition to the school-age children of ESWs?

Continuity of Educational Opportunities

Definition: What is meant by “Continuity of Educational Opportunities”?

One of the principles guiding the approach to education in response to COVID-19 is providing continuity of educational opportunities for all students. In order to achieve this, students will be supported with opportunities that allow for a variety of learning experiences to develop literacy and numeracy skills, support social, emotional and physical well-being and continue their studies in content areas across the curriculum. These learning opportunities will enable students to further develop the competencies and understandings outlined in the BC curriculum despite circumstances that have interrupted usual school attendance and in-person learning.

Parameters for Schools and School Districts

Over the next days and weeks, individual educators, schools and school districts are preparing to support student learning until normal operations are resumed. It is expected that students will be connected to their teachers no later than mid-April. The following parameters are provided to support this important work and to ensure that our shared efforts promote quality learning experiences across BC.

Learners and families can anticipate that their school and teachers will:

- Be attentive to health and safety in the provision of learning initiatives being put in place;
- Acknowledge that social-emotional learning is a key component of the educational experience and will be evident in the competencies being supported during the remote learning experiences;
- Explore and share ways for families to access available local resources and partner agencies that support student learning and social-emotional health;
- Make regular efforts to engage with students and families to provide materials, resources and activities that will support quality learning experiences that are sustainable over time. Establishing reasonable expectations regarding online or phone communication from the school to address student or family questions will be an important part of the initial phase of this work;
- Be responsive to individual student needs in the learning opportunities being provided;
- Identify how school and school district personnel (non-enrolling teachers, administrators, education assistants and other support staff) may be involved in supporting the classroom teacher’s creation and maintenance of a quality learning environment for individuals and groups of students;
- Develop activities, assignments and assessments that are accessible to students and families, recognizing there will be varying levels of access and familiarity with

computer technology. Technology-based learning will not be the only way that student engagement is supported;

- Identify priority curricular competencies that will be the major focus of the remote learning opportunities while regular classes are not in session;
- Share expectations of student engagement and the processes, requirements and timelines that will be used for assessment, evaluation and reporting; and,
- Communicate standards in place regarding protection of privacy and online security and any concerns regarding the storage of student information.

Alternative Approaches to In-person Classes

Whether learning is enabled through individual or group phone calls, email, video connection or hard copy communication, students will benefit from knowing that they are still part of a learning community. We are all starting from different places in our commitment to the different delivery of educational opportunities. Schools, school districts and families have varying levels of infrastructure and systems that they can leverage to facilitate remote learning.

Some educators, students and parents have significant experience in the use of online resources and in establishing the routines that support regular, scheduled attention to learning tasks. For others, the approaches being developed are completely new. It is important to remember that the educator/student relationship is at the core of successful learning, and educators will continue to build on the relationships that have been created over the past several months.

Some teachers will connect with their students in a primarily online environment. Others will use strategies that utilize more traditional resources. Educators everywhere will need to be sensitive to the fact that not all students have regular (or any) access to technology, so allowances should be made for “low tech” ways for students to engage in learning experiences.

As planning begins, educators are encouraged to share strategies and resources to support one another. Cross-school and district collaboration will allow for promising models and approaches to have a positive impact across the province. Given that the current suspension of in-class instruction is happening across the world, there will be many sources of materials and strategies being offered through educator networks and social media connections.

Planning Guide for Teachers

Please refer to the new [Continuity of Learning Planning Guide for Teachers](#) for starting points. This resource should serve as a valuable tool for individual teachers and collaborative groups as planning continues and is adapted over time.

The Ministry will continue to update the Guide with additional information and resources.

Assessment and Reporting

Teachers across the province are empowered to determine a final grade for children based on work completed to-date and the assessment of participation in learning opportunities that will occur over the coming months. Teachers are expected to prepare report cards for their students for June.

The evaluation of learning taking place after the suspension of in-class instruction should be in relation to a smaller selection of learning standards which students are able to complete at home. Since many students may not have easy access to specific learning resources aligned to the curriculum, summative assessment should focus on the development of competencies and key literacy and numeracy skills, rather than mastery of specific content.

British Columbia's Student Reporting Policy allows significant flexibility for schools and school districts regarding the content and format of report cards. For more information, reference the [Student Reporting Policy](#).

The Ministry is looking for opportunities to continue to support teachers, schools and school districts in developing effective assessment techniques in these unique circumstances.

Resources, Tools and Technology Options

As schools and school districts are planning, it will be important to identify what resources, tools and technology infrastructure are already available and where there are gaps in availability and experience in remote learning. In providing teachers and families with resources, schools/school districts will need to consider what is specifically needed for different age groups of learners.

Given that the current suspension of in-class instruction is happening across the world, many resources are being shared online and many vendors are giving free access to their products and services temporarily. Having school/school district level processes in place to highlight and recommend particularly useful products or services will help to streamline the work of classroom teachers in sorting through the many options they are presented. Schools and school districts may create their own lists of recommended resources for teachers, students and/or parents/caregivers.

Considerations:

- Making regular connections between staff, families and students can happen in a variety of ways. Phone calls and hard copy text are low-tech ways to connect, while video conferencing or setting up virtual classrooms are more high-tech solutions.
 - Working with [Focused Education](#), the Ministry of Education has [secured a provincial licence for Zoom](#), a videoconferencing and collaboration tool. The provincial enterprise license for Zoom will be managed by [Focused Education](#), who will notify school districts and independent school authorities when the licenses are available and will reach out to collect the necessary information.

School districts and independent school authorities will receive guidance on administration and configuration for Zoom to ensure the highest level of security. In addition, they will receive a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) template, which should be completed. The [public FAQs](#) include information for parents and students about the use of Zoom.

- Microsoft Teams is a collaboration app that helps your team stay organized and have conversations—all in one place. Teams is part of the Microsoft 365 license with [Focused Education](#) which districts already have and is available for educators and staff to use. Microsoft has made some [resources](#) available to help leverage MS Teams in order to help teachers and students transition to remote learning.
- MyEducation BC – current functionality within MyEducationBC can be leveraged to facilitate communication and information between students, parents and teachers. Please see the [MyEducation BC information sheet](#) on available features and support resources.
- Through ShareEdBC, teachers across the province will have access to curated content aligned to BC's new curriculum in ShareEdBC. ShareEdBC aims to help users across the province connect with each other, and to find and share resources. Currently, an early release of ShareEdBC is being made available, enabling educators to onboard easily. School districts will be contacted by the ShareEdBC team in the next few weeks to provide instructions and support for the onboarding process. For more information, please contact ShareEdBC@gov.bc.ca.
- Learning management systems (LMS) can provide robust environments for teaching and learning but do require training and support for users.
 - For more information about LMS considerations, as well as some no-cost options to support local capacity for the remainder of the school year, see the [Learning Management System and Online Course Options info sheet](#).
- Learning resources come in a variety of formats. Consider what is needed for various age groups, abilities, and delivery methods. Subject to current recommendations by the Provincial Health Officer, schools and school districts may facilitate the distribution of physical learning resources such as books, toolkits, or instructional packages. If this is something your district is considering, it will be essential to follow health guidelines regarding sanitizing of materials. Please ensure proper health measures are in place and that safe processes are established for receiving and distributing materials. Schools/school districts may also be able to facilitate lending of tablets or laptop computers for student use. As with other physical resources, extreme care must be taken regarding health precautions.

- For information about some freely available online course options, see the [Learning Management System and Online Course Options info sheet](#).
- ShareEdBC (see above)
- [TeachBC](#) is an online resource of teaching materials, lessons, and research relevant to the K-12 BC curriculum. The website is public and open to everyone through the generosity of BC public school teachers. Teachers and organizations can share their teaching resources or educational research by registering and uploading their materials or providing links. Anyone can browse and download the resources for classroom or professional use. Browsing is easy. Users can search by subject, grade level, resource type, title, description, language, and more.
- At [Focused Education](#), teachers can access the [BC Digital Classroom](#), a core collection of digital resources for information, lessons, and activities. These resources are also available to all students and to teachers at independent and First Nations schools. School leaders can contact info@focusedresources.ca directly for information. Focused Education has [archived webinars](#) highlighting use of the tools, and is scheduling [additional webinars](#) this spring. Teachers can find information on peer-reviewed digital and print resources in the [K-12 Evaluated Resource Collection](#), discover curated collections featuring [free websites](#) for instructional use, and [Indigenous authors and content](#). Teachers can participate in a one-hour overview on the [selection of learning resources](#).
- [Keep Learning BC](#) is a central place where families can find ideas for everyday educational activities, annotated links to free learning resources, as well as how to help children keep well and learn while they're at home.
- Where possible, utilize open, publicly available resources that do not have fees associated. Look to public and community institutions such as libraries, museums, and educational centers to see if they have any programming available even if they may be closed.
- Ensure the accessibility of virtual spaces and the inclusive design of digital and online content.
- IT staff at the school and school district level will be essential resources to ensure that district or school web infrastructure can sustain an increased volume of traffic and that web portals and online learning environments are robust enough to be accessed via a range of solutions (e.g., devices, operating systems, assistive technology). Providing remote professional connections and opportunities to learn and share may be needed to support IT staff as they address emerging challenges. If schools and school districts implement (or share) e-learning platforms that rely on students accessing school/school district data center resources and are concerned with bandwidth, NGN Leads should [contact the ministry](#) to assess the need for upgrades.

- Ensure privacy and protection of information safeguards are in place. See the “Privacy and Protection of Information” Section below for more information. Ensure clear expectations are set for staff, students and families.

Training and Support

The suspension of in-person classes requires a shift to new ways of working and learning. For teachers, support teachers, students and their families, this requires navigating new processes, learning environments and routines. It is recommended that schools and school districts provide initial training and support to teachers and families during this transition. The level and type of support needed will vary depending on the particular needs of a school community.

In planning for continuity of learning, a school or school district may want to begin with a needs assessment. Whether through informal discussion between staff members or through surveys to staff and families, gathering information about the experience, access to technology, and comfort their learning community has with remote teaching and learning can be helpful in determining what training and supports will be required.

[Sample parent survey fields](#) are available to be used as a starting point. Schools and school districts may also add demographics questions to gather additional information such as contact information, number of children in families and where they go to school. Depending on the information required, MyEducationBC might be a good starting place.

Educators, parents and some students will be looking to schools and school districts to provide access to training and supports in several areas as they explore technologies that are new to them. It may be appropriate to establish a “help desk” team (or teams) at the school district/authority level to facilitate this work. In larger schools, a staff member may be the best resource to provide this service.

Processes and Policies

School districts and independent school authorities are encouraged to consider and share ideas and resources as they develop processes and policies required during the time when in-school instruction is suspended. School districts/authorities will also need to review their own policies in a number of areas to determine whether those policies need to be amended or suspended during this period.

Areas for school districts/authorities to consider include:

- Attendance policies for students
 - A [sample process](#) is available to use as a starting point.
- Assessment and Reporting
 - See “[Assessment and Reporting](#)” section above.
- Reporting to post-secondary institutions

- The Ministry of Education is working with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training to determine processes and policies for reporting to post-secondary institutions.
- Review and documentation of progress related to IEPs.
- Spring activities planned for transitioning of preschoolers into kindergarten. This is an important process for all youngsters and families, especially for parents of students with special needs.
- Processes to support students with special needs transitioning out of the K-12 system.
- Guidance on how students with diverse learning needs will be able to access specialized supports traditionally delivered onsite through direct service to learners or via consultation with the educational team (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, teachers of students with sensory impairments).

Privacy & Protection of Information

As schools and school districts develop their continuity of educational opportunities plans they should review their guidelines and practices around the selection of learning resources and tools with particular attention to the issue of information privacy and security. Schools and school districts will provide teachers with clear expectations as they expand their use of digital learning resources and apps for student instruction and learning. In addition, student and parent forms for consent may need to be created or updated.

[Protecting Information](#) is a free, openly available online course addressing some basics related to the identification, protection and security of information that districts may consider offering to staff.

[Focused Education](#) is a source of information and support. It provides [templates](#) for developing consent forms and privacy impact assessments. There are draft materials to guide [resource selection processes](#) (e.g. App Reference Guide to Privacy Implications). Schools/School Districts can contact Focused Education directly at info@focusedresources.ca.

Regardless of what innovative new solutions are adopted, take the time to ensure that protection of personal information is embedded into any new processes of collection, use, disclosure, storage, transmittal and the use of technology, [in accordance with FOIPPA](#), and reach out for assistance wherever you may be in doubt.

For general privacy information, you can also [contact the Ministry](#).

Graduation Program

Information for All Grade 10-12 Students and Adult Learners

The health and safety of students, staff, and their families is the highest priority during this unique time. The Ministry is committed to ensuring continuity of learning leading to final marks for all students, and graduation for those eligible.

For students in grades 10 and 11, school districts and independent school authorities should focus on courses in the subject areas required for graduation. For students in grade 12 on track to graduate this year, the focus should be on the total 80 credits needed for graduation. For adults pursuing the Adult Dogwood, the focus should be on the 20 required credits.

Information on graduation requirements are [available online](#).

As stated in the Minister's [letter to all parents, guardians and school/school district staff](#), it is expected that schools will implement a variety of measures to ensure continued learning for students. The suspension of in-class instruction means learning will continue in a different form for most students. The Ministry has provided guidelines to help educators provide learning opportunities that are not in person.

The Ministry is not mandating or specifying the minimum number of hours that must be completed for a student to receive credit for a grade 10, 11, or 12 course. Hours do not necessarily reflect the actual learning that occurs. The focus is on determining if, and how, *sufficient learning* has taken place during these exceptional circumstances.

Sufficient learning will be determined by teachers using their professional judgement. Grounded in the curriculum, teachers will assess what individual students know, understand, and are able to demonstrate to determine whether *sufficient learning* has taken place to enable the student to pursue further learning in the curricular and content area. To do this, teachers should prioritize which learning standards can be learned from home, with particular emphasis on the development of a student's literacy, numeracy, and Core Competencies.

Teachers are empowered to determine a final grade for students based on work completed to-date and the assessment of participation in learning opportunities that will occur over the coming months. Teachers will work with students to fulfill course requirements according to their school/school district plans during the suspension of in-class instruction. In doing so, they will consider those students whose learning needs or circumstances may require unique approaches.

The Ministry is looking for opportunities to continue to support teachers, schools and school districts in developing effective assessment techniques in these unique circumstances.

Elective Courses

Elective courses are still of significant importance to students, though continued delivery of some courses may be more difficult (e.g., courses with required equipment or unique environments that may not be possible for students to access at home, such as band, work experience, trades and technology, etc).

For elective courses with unique challenges, teachers have the discretion to provide a passing grade if *sufficient learning* has been achieved. For elective courses where a student's receipt of an "incomplete" grade would result in the student not graduating, teachers are encouraged to support and appropriately assess the student's achievement in that subject to ensure suitable credit is awarded.

Given the unique structure of Trades Training Programs and oversight by the Industry Training Authority, new information on assessments and programming for these courses is [available online](#).

Information Specific to All Graduating Students

Every student eligible to graduate this year will graduate. To be eligible to graduate means that if a student were to successfully complete courses underway and in progress for completion this June, they would satisfy all graduation requirements. This does not mean that students will graduate "no matter what". Students are expected to continue their learning and complete the assignments set out by their teachers in order to graduate.

Teachers will work with students to fulfill the requirements of Career Life Connections, including the capstone project, according to their school/school district plans for continuity of student learning during the suspension of in-class instruction. Teachers will use their professional judgement in determining student marks and the granting of graduation credit for these requirements.

For the specific requirement of 30 hours of work experience or career-life experience, students can be given many opportunities to fulfil these requirements in alternative ways. For example, students could do work around their home such as babysitting younger siblings, household cleaning, yard maintenance, food preparation, maintenance work or household accounting. With this stated, student safety is paramount and normal mentorship requirements may not be possible.

For capstone projects, students should be able to complete many aspects of the self-assessment and critical analysis, as well as the planning for capstone representation. Recognizing they may not have access to specific samples of work or other important elements needed for their capstone presentations, efforts to innovate under the current circumstances should be recognized. Students can be given many different options and significant flexibility regarding how to design and present a more limited capstone via alternative methods such as videoconference or teleconference.

Graduation Assessments

The previously scheduled April 2020 graduation assessment administration is cancelled. The Ministry is committed to ensuring the success of all students and is weighing many factors to minimize the impact of this cancellation on students. Particular attention is being paid to assessing a range of alternatives for those grade 12 students who have not completed the Numeracy 10 Assessment required for graduation but who are otherwise on track to graduate this school year.

In addition, the Ministry is closely monitoring the evolving COVID 19 situation to consider how the scheduled final administration of the Language Arts 12 exams in June may be impacted for the small number of students in the province to whom the exams apply. These exams are only for students who completed the corresponding course prior to June 2019, or are in a Distributed Learning school and started the corresponding course by June 2019, and have yet to write the exam or wish to re-write the exam. The Ministry will again consider a range of alternative mechanisms in the event that this exam is cancelled or offered via alternative means in June, and will work to ensure students are not negatively impacted.

Transition to Post-Secondary Studies

Students must be able to continue their learning, complete their courses, and move successfully to the next grade, to post-secondary studies or to the world of work. For students looking to pursue post-secondary studies next school year, the Ministry will ensure transcripts reflect all final course marks submitted by schools to enable post-secondary institutions to proceed with their admission processes under the current circumstances. Furthermore, the Ministry will continue to work with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training and with post-secondary institutions to ensure the smooth transition of graduating students in this extraordinary year.

Student Transfers to Online/Distributed Learning

Prolonged periods of disruption of in-class instruction often trigger an increased volume of requests from students wishing to transfer to from “bricks and mortar” schools to online/Distributed Learning programs offered within or outside of the school district/independent school authority.

Transfer requests from “Bricks and Mortar” to online/Distributed Learning should not be encouraged between now and June 30, 2020. Accommodating these requests is ultimately a local decision but is not recommended. In this situation, there will be other locally developed solutions that can better support the relationship and connections between students, their teachers, and support staff while providing continuity of learning.

This recommendation does not preclude what would be considered “normal” operations or registrations at the DL school. Examples of “normal” operations include (but are not limited to):

- A Grade 12 student who is missing a course for graduation and needs to complete through online/DL.

- Additional courses in the program of a student who attends the DL school full time.
- Adult student enrolments.

If a local school district or independent school authority is considering allowing such transfers, the following factors should weigh into their decisions:

- Does the online/Distributed Learning program have sufficient funding for the transfer?
 - The Ministry is cancelling the May data collection for public school districts. Funding for the remainder of the year will be based on the Operating Grant Tables published as of December 2019 (to be updated with the February 2020 enrolment count), where funding for the May 2020 count will be based on school district forecasts of enrolment. Public school districts already have funding for increased enrolment between February and May.
 - The May collection will be conducted for independent DL schools only but will be brought forward (Snapshot date: April 7, Due date: April 16). Because of this accelerated process the requirement to have completed 5% of the course under the Active Policy has been suspended for this count only.
- Does the online/Distributed Learning program have the capacity to accommodate increased demand? Can the capacity be increased and, if so, what would be required (e.g. staff recruitment and training, technology/infrastructure upgrades, etc)?
- Assuming some level of system capacity limitations, how will requests be prioritized? For example:
 - Grade 12 students requiring core courses for graduation
 - Grade 12 students requiring elective courses for entrance into post-secondary programs
 - Grades 10 and 11 students – core courses
 - Grades 10 and 11 students – elective courses
- Is the student a suitable candidate for online/Distributed Learning, based on factors including age, skill level/readiness, individual needs, family support, etc?
- Are there other options that would better support the student's learning and success (e.g. continuity with the student's current teacher may carry benefits in terms of supporting assessment and the student's social and emotional well-being)?
- If the transfer is out of district/authority, what tuition agreements and funding transfers (e.g. partial funding transfer based on percentage of course already completed) will be required?

Continuity of Supports

Students with Diverse Needs

School districts and independent school authorities are expected to develop continuity of learning plans for students with disabilities or diverse abilities to allow for continued learning in the home environment and to ensure equity of access to learning.

Continuity of learning plans for students with disabilities and diverse abilities should be aligned with the goals identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and developed in consultation with specialists who typically support the student in the educational setting (e.g. speech language pathologists, occupational therapists). While these learning plans may not be able to replicate the services provided in the educational setting, they should provide staff and parents/caregivers with activities that are appropriate in the circumstances.

School districts and independent schools must ensure any online learning opportunities provided as a part of a continuity of learning plan are accessible to all students.

Additional considerations for school districts/authorities could include having:

- Classroom teachers create continuity of learning plans for designated students whose learning needs are documented in an IEP and/or for English Language Learning students whose learning needs are documented in an Annual Instructional Plan. School administrators can determine the appropriate staff to assist classroom teachers to develop and support learning plans that include information as identified in students' IEPs/AIPs.
- Non-enrolling teachers collaborate with classroom teachers to ensure that content being prepared for at-home learning is accessible, meaningful for all learners, and can be supported by parents/caregivers. Particular attention and support is required for those who traditionally face barriers to accessing online content.
- Specialist support staff create specific plans on how students with diverse learning needs will be able to access specialized supports traditionally delivered onsite through direct service to learners or via consultation with the educational team (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, teachers of students with sensory impairments).
- Educational Assistants continue to support teachers in the delivery of instruction for students with disabilities and diverse abilities. Support may include:
 - preparing assignments, content and activities;
 - assisting with the collection of materials that will be sent to students;
 - maintaining regular communication and check-in with students as determined by the classroom teacher, and under the direction of the teacher or related service provider; and

- supporting families and students in accessing and participating in remote learning and therapy experiences as needed.

Teachers should maintain ongoing communication with colleagues who also serve their students (paraprofessionals, non-enrolling-teachers, related service providers, counsellors, school-based team, etc.).

Autism Funding and Access to Respite

The Ministry of Education is working with the Ministry of Children and Family Development on this issue. Funding for autism services and respite falls under MCFD's area of responsibility and continued planning is underway on how to respond to some of the unique challenges faced by families. More information on additional resources for parents and caregivers with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder can be found in the following section.

Additional Resources

[Provincial Outreach Programs](#) are available to support school districts and independent school authorities in developing remote learning plans for students with disabilities and diverse abilities.

Most organizations that provide assistance to families continue to be operating during this time, however support may be offered in different ways. Families are encouraged to seek support from agencies they are familiar with and that they have accessed prior to the pandemic.

- More information is available in this list of [resources for parents/caregivers of children with disabilities and diverse abilities](#).

MCFD has also posted information on [family and social supports in response to COVID-19](#) on their website.

Mental Health and Well-Being

Supporting the safety and health of students, families and staff is a top priority during a pandemic event. In addition to taking measures to protect our physical health, we also need to attend to our social and emotional well-being.

During this time especially, students need to know that they are valued and that they are still part of a school community. Students' sense of well-being may continue to shift as the pandemic evolves. Schools and school districts should keep in mind that students who were not considered vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 outbreak may now be experiencing mental health challenges.

The impactful nature of pandemic events may be accompanied by increased rates of domestic violence, substance abuse and other traumatic situations that affect the health and safety of students. As educators and support staff can be valuable "eyes and ears" for the

community, they should be reminded of their [“Duty to Report”](#) if they become concerned about student safety.

School districts and independent school authorities are encouraged to ensure supports to address mental well-being are provided to families and students, and to ensure educators feel well supported in addressing new challenges related to mental health that may arise in this new learning environment. In times when anxiety and stress may be increased, teachers in all subject areas are encouraged to create opportunities to weave mental well-being throughout all learning opportunities. Schools should continue to support a whole-child approach through whichever continuity of education models they use to support ongoing learning.

In addition to the three curricular Core Competencies - Communication, Thinking, and Personal and Social - the Physical and Health Education (PHE) curriculum focuses on well-being and the connections between physical, intellectual, mental, and social health. Social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches also support positive environments, provide techniques to promote well-being and positive mental health, and support students who may have increased needs.

Teachers should consider how to build in behavioural competencies central to SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. In response to situations of trauma, the Ministry also has [trauma-informed practice resources](#) for educators available on the [erase website](#).

School/school district leadership teams should also consider the well-being of adults in the school system and ensure supports are in place. This is a unique time for everyone, and the positive mental health of adults will have a direct impact on the students. Additional information and resources on this topic are available under the [“Staff Well-Being” section below](#).

Additional considerations for school districts/authorities should include:

- Assessing how changes to the delivery of educational services and supports may impact the school community, and creating opportunities to support students, families and staff in transitioning to a new learning environment.
 - Connecting with children on a personal level to let them know they are valued and still have a place in the school community.
 - Developing a plan for how staff, students and families can continue to reach school administrators via phone, email or online platforms, including a process for new referrals.
 - Identifying helpful online resources to post on the school/school district website, along with the counsellor’s contact information.
- Exploring new ways to create a sense of connection and community among students, families and staff as part of efforts to support ongoing learning.

- For example, setting up infrastructure to support a virtual 'network' of students so that social opportunities exist in a safe environment and they can learn to build resilience together.
- Determining how best to reach priority and vulnerable students, and watching for signs of other students whose baseline behaviours might have changed.
 - Establishing touchpoints to check in with students and monitor behaviour, mood and activities.
 - Coordinating with external service providers (e.g. child and youth mental health, MCFD) to provide wrap-around supports to students in need.

Additional Resources:

- [Mental Well-Being - information and supports for students, families and caring adults](#)
- [Managing COVID-19, Stress, Anxiety and Depression](#)
- [MCFD child and youth mental health services](#)

Supports for Families

School districts and independent school authorities are expected to outline supports that will continue to be made available to families through the school district/authority, including specific information on how to access these supports. In addition, school districts/authorities should remind parents and caregivers of available local community resources that can help support ongoing learning and family well-being.

Additional considerations for school districts/authorities should include:

- Identifying families who were receiving regular support through school programs and staff (e.g. time with a Family Support Worker), or who may have emerging support needs, and developing a plan to regularly connect with those families to assist with their well-being.
- Ensuring staff who work in family support roles remain accessible to families and provide additional supports beyond continued learning opportunities for students.
- Reviewing and potentially shifting staff assignments, including non-enrolling teachers, to ensure local school communities can meet elevated support needs of families during a pandemic.
- Assigning school-level staff to connect with local community-based organizations to coordinate school and community supports and referrals for families.
- Reviewing existing service delivery methods (e.g. home visitation) to ensure they align with current guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and exploring alternatives where feasible and appropriate (e.g. telephone, Skype, FaceTime, etc).

Additional Resources:

Most organizations that provide essential services to families continue to be operating during this time, however support may be offered in different ways. Many of these organizations have provincial offices and toll-free phone numbers that can connect families with local organizations that can provide assistance.

More information is available in this list of [community services and resources](#).

School Meal Programs

While the suspension of in-person classes and physical distancing measures limits the ability of schools to provide meal programs to students, school districts/authorities with existing meal programs should plan for the continued provision of meals to students most in need.

School districts/authorities with existing meal programs should continue to provide services based on need and operational feasibility, and:

- Regularly assess student need based on the current context and the understanding that circumstances can change weekly.
 - Students who were not considered vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 pandemic may now be experiencing food instability.
 - Universal meal programs may need to shift or adapt their focus to those students most in need.
 - School districts/authorities that were not previously offering school meal programs can assess opportunities to respond to emerging student needs.
- Ensure that meal programs adhere to current direction from the Provincial Health Officer, and [support the safety of students, staff and volunteers](#).
 - Program delivery will need to be responsive to guidance from the Provincial Health Officer.
- Engage with local, provincial and national organizations to create and leverage community partnerships, and coordinate efforts to support students in need.
 - School districts/authorities may want to connect with other local community agencies to create an inventory of food provision services for those in need, to help identify where there are gaps in meeting those needs.

Examples of approaches within B.C. and Canada:

- *Redeploying school bus drivers to deliver meals to students' doorsteps.*
- *Offering drive-thru or in-person meal pick-up at designated school locations.*
- *Arranging regular shopping/pick-up times with local grocery stores for school meal program supplies.*

The Ministry will continue to work with K-12 education partners, government and non-government organizations to support school districts/authorities with ongoing planning and share information on resources as they become available.

Additional considerations for school districts/authorities include:

- Availability of human resources (i.e. teachers, support staff, volunteers) to support programs.
- Safe food preparation
 - impact of increased physical distancing protocols (e.g. closure of commercial food preparation facilities);
 - use of community volunteers; and
 - collaboration with existing local food programs.
- Safe food distribution
 - strategies to support students/families who are sick and/or self-isolating;
 - redeployment of school/school district staff not needed onsite;
 - use of community volunteers;
 - food/meal deliveries; and
 - food/meal pick-up schedules and routines that allow for physical distancing.
- Opportunities to incorporate creative and innovative approaches.

Additional Resources:

A number of community businesses, non-profit agencies and charities provide support to school meal programs, in addition to the following organizations:

- [BC Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food \(BC-CHSF\)](#)
- [President's Choice \(PC\) Children's Charity](#)
- [Vancouver Sun Kids Fund](#)
- [BackPack Buddies Program](#)
- [Breakfast Club of Canada](#)
- [Farm to Cafeteria Canada](#)
- Rotary Clubs (see local websites for contact information)

International and Boarded Students

International and boarded students (which may include Canadian students from other provinces/territories) may be especially vulnerable at this time, particularly in cases where their home country is also being impacted by COVID-19. Disruptions to their regular educational routine, reduced access to peers and community services, and travel restrictions that prevent them from returning home can all contribute to increased feelings of isolation, stress and anxiety.

School district and independent school authority decisions regarding these programs should carefully consider potential impacts on students, their families, and homestay families, and place a priority focus on student safety and well-being.

Program Continuity/Repatriation of Students

Decisions to require international and/or boarded students to return to their home country during a pandemic event are left to the discretion of individual school districts and independent school authorities.

School districts and independent school authorities are expected to take the following factors into consideration when making these decisions:

- Availability of safe local housing conditions (e.g. homestay arrangement where the student is welcome and the family is able to offer reasonable support for continuity of learning) - may require a review of existing homestay agreements in light of increased responsibilities, contingency plans if homestay parents fall ill.
- Availability of adequate health and well-being supports for international students through the local school district/authority, which may require coordination with community service providers.
- Possibility of safe return to the students' home country (e.g. viable transportation, no travel or border restrictions that would prevent re-entry to their home country).
- Clearly defined and communicated processes for collecting or rebating fees related to international student programs including medical, tuition and homestay fees.

Mental Health Resources in Other Languages:

- *IMMEDIATE HELP: Mental Health Crisis Line: 1 -800-784-2433.*
- [Here to Help - Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health - Information in Other Languages](#)
- [Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre](#)

Where a decision is made to send international or boarded students back to their home country, school districts/authorities are expected to make continuous learning options available to the students, consistent with educational programming offered to resident students and provided there are no other barriers (technical or otherwise) to the student's

participation. International students who are enrolled with a K-12 public or independent school in B.C. will be allowed to complete their coursework to continue their education program this school year via online/Distributed Learning opportunities through their respective school or school district, or through an arrangement approved by their respective school or school district.⁸

Homestay Arrangements

Where homestay arrangements remain in place, school districts and independent school authorities should consider having discussions with homestay families regarding contingency plans if a member of their household were to become ill with COVID-19.

Staffing

School district and independent school authority planning should also include consideration of the level of resourcing required for school and district-level positions supported by International Student Programs for the 2020-2021 school year.

Reporting

School districts and independent school authorities with international education programs will be required to provide the Ministry with status updates as requested.

⁸ International students (non-residents) who are not enrolled with a B.C. K-12 school, and have not been residing in B.C. to attend school, are not eligible for this option. School District No. 73 Business Company (Global Education) is the only provincially-approved K-12 online learning provider for students not residing in B.C.

Facilities and Operations

School districts and independent school authorities are encouraged to work with their local medical health officer to ensure that school facilities and operations align with current public health guidance. The [Provincial Health Officer's guidelines for K-12 school settings](#) and the Public Health Agency of Canada's [community-based measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19](#) include helpful information on a variety of topics including preventative hygiene practices, cleaning procedures, and strategies to support [physical distancing](#).

Building Access

School districts and independent school authorities are encouraged to have enhanced controls in place to limit access to buildings to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

For parents and students requiring onsite child care or learning support, schools/school districts must develop processes on how to prioritize in-person access to schools for those most in need of support (e.g. children of Essential Services Workers, students that will not be able to easily engage in remote learning opportunities). School districts/authorities can also consider additional measures such as changing classroom set-up, limiting the number of students in each class⁹, and using different parts of the school to support physical distancing and enable good hygiene practices.

To ensure that students have access to what they need to successfully engage in virtual learning opportunities, schools/school districts may provide students and families with the opportunity to retrieve personal items (including medications) and pick up needed materials from the school including textbooks, workbooks, printed materials, and school-based technology devices. Utilizing limited hours and staggered scheduling for pick-ups can help to reduce the density of staff and visitors at the school. Enhanced security measures will also be required to effectively manage such situations, which could include monitoring the entryway to ask visitors about recent travel, presence of symptoms, etc.

For staff, mitigation measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 can include staggering work schedules (where possible) and limiting building access to certain hours (including weekend access) or parts of the building.

The [Provincial Health Officer's mass gatherings order](#) is intended to prevent large groups of people coming together in close quarters. Schools can have more than 50 students and staff in the building at one time, provided they are not all in one area at the same time (avoid large in-person meetings or assemblies) and are actively engaged in physical distancing.

⁹ At this time, there are no specific staff-to-children ratios that must be followed for learning/instruction in a school setting from a public health perspective - adults (and children) within a school setting should follow public health and safety measures and maintain a distance of 2m from one another. However, staff-to-child ratios must be followed in a child care context – more information is available under the [Educational Services vs Child Care section](#) of this document.

Additional Considerations for School Districts/Authorities:

- Develop and/or review home use agreements for lending out school-based technology devices.
- Establish contingency plans if textbooks or other core materials are not available for every student.
- Create and distribute basic supply kits for students without access to key materials at home while assuring that sharing of any materials is done in a way that is safe and protects children, families and staff from potential exposure to COVID-19.
- Consider how to leverage other school staff and services, such as bus drivers and vehicles, to deliver learning materials to students most in need in order to limit public access to buildings.

Community Use

School districts and independent school authorities should review existing school-based programming (e.g. child care, Strong Start) and after-hours community rental policies and agreements to:

- Ensure alignment with public health guidance regarding physical distancing; and
- Prioritize supports for Essential Services Workers, vulnerable students and families in need.

While there is no provincial direction to close school playgrounds at this time, the Provincial Health Officer recommends that children interact and play within their family unit.

Supplies and Custodial Services

School districts and independent school authorities should ensure schools continue to follow the highest standard of cleaning practices. The Public Health Agency of Canada has posted guidance on [cleaning and disinfecting public spaces](#), including recommendations regarding cleaning procedures and products.

At the provincial level, Emergency Management BC (EMBC) is coordinating supply issues as part of the COVID-19 response. EMBC has asked all ministries to establish an inventory of critical supplies (e.g. personal protective equipment, cleaning materials, etc.) that organizations have available. The inventories will be reviewed to ensure essential services in the province can continue to operate efficiently.

The Ministry will also work with Focused Education Resources around other service and supply options as the need becomes apparent. School districts/authorities can [contact the Ministry](#) or [Focused Education](#) with questions.

School districts and independent school authorities may wish to consider how best to conserve supplies where possible, especially custodial and cleaning supplies. This may require reviewing which spaces are being reserved for staff and/or students to interact in-person and consolidating cleaning efforts accordingly.

Capital Projects

Public Schools

Budget 2020 (for 2020/21 fiscal year) approvals for minor capital project funding are not affected by recent events. In addition, fiscal year restrictions for minor capital programs (e.g. Annual Facilities Grant, School Enhancement Program, Carbon Neutral Capital Program) will be waived for the 2020/21 fiscal year - school districts will be allowed to carry over 2020/21 minor capital funding to 2021/22, if required.

However, given the current supply chain and labour situation, school districts should exercise caution when deciding whether to proceed to tender for both minor and major capital projects.

School districts with major capital projects under construction who have received delay notices or Force Majeure notices from their builders should share this information with the Ministry's Capital Management Branch staff as soon as possible.

School districts with major capital projects at the pre-tender stage are reminded that Ministry approval is required before proceeding to tender.

Questions about major or minor capital projects can be directed to [Ministry staff](#).

Independent Schools

Independent school authorities should also be aware that the current supply chain and labour situation may impact their capital projects and should use the appropriate amount of caution.

Boarding Schools

Given unique considerations related to shared accommodation and dining spaces, boarding schools are strongly encouraged to align policies and procedures with current public health guidance including promoting proper hygiene practices, following thorough cleaning protocols, and implementing physical distancing strategies in accordance with [Provincial Health Officer orders](#).

Consideration should also be given to isolation and risk mitigation procedures in the event that a boarding school student or staff member becomes ill with COVID-19.

Supporting information can be found in the [Provincial Health Officer's guidelines for K-12 school settings](#) and the Public Health Agency of Canada's [community-based measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19](#).

Financial Planning and Business Continuity

Financial Planning – School Districts

Student Reporting and Funding

The Ministry will issue funding to school districts for the May enrolment count based on estimated funding identified in the Operating Grant Tables published as of December 2019, which will shortly be updated with the February count data. School districts will not be required to provide May enrolment information to the Ministry, recognizing the current situation and the development of continuity of learning plans. Funding adjustments from the February reporting period will be processed as per usual.

At this time, the process for the 2020/21 school year remains unchanged.

Balanced Budgets

School districts are still required to submit balanced budgets, as approved by Board by-law, to the Ministry by June 30, 2020. In order to meet Boards' requirement to consult with the public on their budget, the Ministry can confirm that electronic submissions or virtual meetings are considered sufficient. Districts can utilize the provincial Zoom license for such meetings.

The Ministry and BCASBO have identified potential risks related to the COVID-19 pandemic to be considered when preparing the 2020-21 Annual Budget. Preparation of 2020-21 balanced budgets should be accompanied by budget assumptions and risk mitigation plans related to those budget assumptions. Assumptions in the following areas may have the most impact on the volatility of budgets:

- Revenues related to International Education and Summer School programs.
- Expenses related to Employee Benefits, Maintenance Operations – Custodial, Maintenance Operations – Information Technology, Salaries – Substitutes, and Student Transportation.

A more detailed list of considerations will be available shortly.

School districts may need to utilize a greater proportion of accumulated surplus to balance their 2020-21 budgets.

Event-Driven Reporting

The Province has initiated a process for government organizations to record and report on financial transactions that are incremental to regular operations due to a specific major event, to facilitate consistent financial reporting by the Ministry of Finance across the entire government reporting entity.

Effective March 11, 2020 and continuing until further notice, the government has identified COVID -19 as a major reporting event. Ministries, crown agencies, school districts, universities, colleges, and health authorities are required to track incremental and necessary

costs that are incurred as a direct result of COVID-19 effective March 11, 2020 for the purpose of consistent government-wide reporting. There is no expectation that the Province or the Federal Government will reimburse these incremental costs.

Each school district must establish a process for tracking its own COVID-19 related costs and provide specific direction to staff to facilitate reporting out as required regarding costs incurred or forecasted. Costs identified must be:

1. Directly related to the COVID-19 event
2. Incremental to the cost of normal operations
3. Unavoidable operational expenses

The Ministry of Education is also working with BCASBO to determine how best to track COVID-19 response related costs/savings during this period. Further guidance will be forthcoming on this process which may include the requirement to track the redeployment of existing resources to COVID-19 related tasks, and the tracking of new COVID-19 related activities.

Financial Reporting

The Ministry confirms that there is still a requirement to submit the Quarterly GRE Report no later than April 15, 2020. The fiscal quarter ending March 31st is required across all of Government and is particularly important as March 31st is the Provincial Government's year-end; the figures rolled up into this reporting affect critical things such as the Province's credit-rating and therefore the interest rates charged on debt. The Ministry of Finance has reminded all ministries that there will be no extension to financial reporting deadlines for the March quarter. As a result, there is no leeway in this requirement.

The Ministry will distribute the instructions for financial reporting as usual before the end of the school year. School districts should be prepared, considering the event-driven reporting outlined above, that these requirements may be different from what was required in previous years.

Should a school district incur an actual annual deficit in 2020-21 in a magnitude greater than its accumulated surplus, the Minister of Education has the authority to grant approval for this accumulated deficit and set deficit retirement conditions.

Should a school district believe it is at risk of running an operating deficit, it is encouraged to [contact the Ministry](#) as soon as possible.

Employment Data and Analysis System (EDAS) Reporting

The EDAS reporting window will open as normal on April 1, 2020, but this year will be extended to May 30th.

Financial Planning – Independent School Authorities

Student Reporting and Funding

For Distributed Learning (DL):

- The Ministry is suspending the May Distributed Learning enrolment counts, which was scheduled with a snapshot date of May 1, 2020 and a reporting date of May 8, 2020. The following amended dates have been agreed to for the 2019/20 school year:
 - Snapshot date: April 7th
 - Due Date: April 16th
- Students may still enroll in an independent DL school after April 7, 2020, but will not be funded; the number of students who would enroll between the new snapshot date of April 7 and the old snapshot date of May 1 will have been small.
- The reporting process will proceed as usual through the 1701 process, which will include instructions for the 2020/21 school year student counts.
- The duplicate resolution process will proceed with the duplicates being sent on April 21, to be returned on April 24.
- The Ministry is also temporarily suspending the requirement in the Active Policy that students must complete 5% of a course to meet funding requirements for the spring 2020 independent DL student count only.
- Supporting these moves the Ministry intends to bring forward the June 30 payments for Group 1 DL schools to May 29 and will work with FISA to identify significant cost pressures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Group 1 and Group 2 Standard Schools:

- The Ministry is currently considering a revised enrolment count process to replace the May Eligible Student enrolment count. The proposed process may include earlier reporting dates and require that eligible students complete fewer hours, but is subject to further approvals and will require a formal amendment to the Independent Schools Regulation.
- When these processes are approved and in place, the Ministry intends to bring forward the June 30th payments for both Group 1 and 2 standard schools to May 29th and will work with FISA to identify significant cost pressures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further details will be forthcoming and shared with independent school authorities as soon as possible.
- The Ministry is removing the requirement to submit audited Eligible Student reports; a revised form, requiring the same information as is currently submitted, will be available when the revised process is approved.

Business Continuity

Business Continuity Planning identifies critical business services, including associated procedures and resource requirements, and defines a minimum level of service to allow an organization to continue when “business as usual” is not possible. Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) support senior management to prioritize and direct staff in accordance with their identified critical services.

At this time, business continuity planning should identify and plan for critical services in five areas: Education, Administration, Human Resources, Facilities, and Support Services.

The Ministry is working with the BC Public School Employers’ Association to create templates and resources to support the development of BCPs specific to COVID-19. School/districts authorities are encouraged to [contact the Ministry’s Business Continuity Advisor](#) for additional assistance.

The Ministry plans to distribute guidelines on best practices for BCPs based on existing sector plans.

Human Resources

Staff Well-Being

Supporting the health and safety of staff is a critical component of an effective service continuity plan. Staff may be experiencing increased levels of stress and uncertainty as they navigate the impact of COVID-19 on their personal and professional lives.

School districts and independent school authorities are encouraged to:

- Include strategies to support staff safety and well-being as a priority area of focus in their planning.
- Provide opportunities for staff to have input on local decision-making.
- Implement strategies to increase connectedness (e.g. provide regular updates to staff, utilize interactive virtual meeting formats where possible, set up daily check-ins by supervisor or through a “buddy” system).
- Promote mental health and well-being supports for staff offered through the district/authority’s Employee and Family Assistance Program service provider.

Additional Resources

- [Mental Well-Being - information and supports for students, families and caring adults](#)
- [Managing COVID-19 Stress, Anxiety and Depression](#)
- [COVID-19 and Mental Health](#) (Canadian Mental Health Association)
- [Working Remotely During COVID-19: Your Mental Health and Well-Being](#) (American Psychiatric Association)
- The BC Public School Employers’ Association (BCPSEA) has arranged free school district access to *LifeSpeak* - an extensive online video library with renowned experts speaking on a range of topics (wellness, family, professional development). Contact [BCPSEA](#) for more information.

Return to Work

Provided they are not experiencing symptoms, staff working in school and school districts are expected to engage with school administration in the planning and delivery of continued learning activities and processes for K-12 students, including how best to support children of essential services workers. This may look different from one school or community to another and could involve onsite and/or remote planning meetings where feasible. School districts and independent school authorities will comply with all applicable laws to support employees continuing to participate in the workplace to the extent that they are able.

Expectations for individual schools and/or staff may be slightly different in cases where staff are engaging in self-isolation at the direction of public health officials and not able to work remotely or onsite. Employers may also consider applicable or unique leaves for staff that may

not be able to work remotely or on-site for other reasons such as being immunocompromised or caring for a family member who is immunocompromised.

Staff members who have confirmed or potential cases of COVID-19, or are not feeling well, should immediately contact their health care provider and school administrator regarding the self-isolation timelines required prior to returning to the workplace.

Staffing Considerations

School districts and independent school authorities have discretion around staffing, including allocation of staff to ensure supports and services for essential services workers, and continued learning opportunities for students. Management of staff attendance expectations to meet these requirements will be determined locally, including whether and how to deploy casual employees. However, there is a provincial expectation of some in-person interaction with some students (e.g. children of essential service workers).¹⁰

School districts and independent school authorities are also being asked to continue providing much needed supports, such as meal programs for vulnerable students and providing parents/caregivers with access to school facilities to retrieve personal or educational items in classrooms when needed. These factors will require some staff to be onsite on a regular basis and establishing associated safety and security routines.

Collective agreements vary between districts and employee groups. Many of the issues outlined in this document have labour implications and may be dealt with in each school district's specific collective agreement or, in the case of independent schools, employee contracts.

Early engagement with representatives of local employee and union groups is strongly recommended regarding decisions about issues such as compensation, deployment, sick leave, call-back and return to work. Specific questions from school districts about these issues should be directed to the [BC Public School Employers' Association](#).

Employee Compensation

For the immediate term of March and April, the provincial government has committed to ensure that employment and income continuity are maintained for employees whose work would not have otherwise been interrupted save for the pandemic response. Except where previously contemplated and planned as part of normal operations, employee layoffs are to be avoided during this period unless it is clear the specific circumstances cannot be mitigated.¹¹ Pay and benefits for scheduled public sector employees should generally also continue as planned during this time period. The Ministry is working with the BC Public School Employers' Association to provide additional guidance on this topic.

¹⁰ See following section on Flexible Work Arrangements and Locations.

¹¹ This direction will be reassessed later in the spring, with any relevant updates to come from the Ministry of Finance.

Casual employees in the public education sector should work with their school and district administrators to determine next steps.

Illness, Quarantine and Self-Isolation

Staff members who have confirmed or potential cases of COVID-19, have been directed to self-isolate (e.g. following return from international travel), or who are not feeling well should immediately contact their health care provider and school administrator.

The Government of Canada has waived the 1-week waiting period for Employment Insurance, for employees in quarantine or who have been directed to self-isolate.

School districts and independent school authorities will need to navigate situations where employees refuse to work, including employees who indicate they do not feel safe, must self-isolate, have a compromised immune system or are pregnant, or who are experiencing child care issues. The Ministry is working with the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) and the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat to assist districts experiencing these situations. School district staff should reach out directly to the [BCPSEA liaisons](#) for additional information.

School districts and independent school authorities are encouraged to review collective agreements, employment contracts and HR policies regarding compensation provisions related to sick leave, quarantine or self-isolation, and to develop contingency plans for reduced staffing levels due to illness.¹²

[Employers are required to excuse workers for illness without requiring a doctor's note.](#)

Flexible Work Arrangements and Locations

Each school district and independent school authority should work with its local employee groups to determine the appropriate protocols and supports for flexible work arrangements and locations, including work-from-home agreements.

Flexibility for staff during this time is encouraged, noting the guidelines from the Provincial Health Officer regarding physical distancing and self-isolation (where required).

To support school districts in this area, the Ministry has engaged with the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) to develop a template that school districts can adapt for their use. School districts should connect with [BCPSEA](#) for more information.

Additional Resources and Contacts

Questions regarding collective agreements or employment related matters should be directed to the [BC Public School Employers' Association](#).

¹² See following section on Flexible Work Arrangements and Locations.

Key Contacts and Additional Resources

For School/School District Administrators:

- COVID-19 related inquiries can be directed to the Ministry by email at educ.covid@gov.bc.ca or by phone at 236-478-2712.
- Medical Health Officer Contact Information by Health Authority:
 - Island Health: <https://www.islandhealth.ca/about-us/medical-health-officers>
 - Fraser: 1-866-990-9941 or CDPHNs@fraserhealth.ca
 - Northern: <https://www.northernhealth.ca/about-us/leadership/medical-health-officers>
 - Interior: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/AboutUs/Leadership/MHO/Pages/default.aspx>
 - VCH: <http://www.vch.ca/about-us/contact-us/medical-health-officers>
- [Provincial Health Officer's guidelines for K-12 school settings](#)
- [Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19](#) (Public Health Agency of Canada)

For Parents/Caregivers, Students and Staff:

- Provincial information and resources related to COVID-19 is available at gov.bc.ca/covid19 or by calling **1-888-COVID19**.
- Information on COVID-19 and B.C. K-12 schools is available at gov.bc.ca/safeschools
- If you or a family member are experiencing symptoms of concern – such as fever, cough or difficulty breathing - access the [BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#) or call 8-1-1 to determine whether you may need further assessment or testing.