

August 10, 2020

**TO MEMBERS OF SCHOOL STAFF**

Dear school staff:

With back-to-school just around the corner, we would like to reach out to you and applaud the incredible efforts you have made for students since the start of the pandemic. We know that this unprecedented situation has created new problems, to which you were able to quickly adapt. In these times of great uncertainty, you have been pillars of stability for our students.

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

Strengthened by recent experience, we are convinced that, together, we will be prepared to create the necessary conditions to ensure that back-to-school for children all across Québec in 2020-2021 will be a rich, inspiring and, above all, safe experience. In this regard, we would also like to share with you the most recent information on the back-to-school plan that has just been announced.

On June 16, after a series of meetings with partners in the education network and the public health authorities, we presented the Back-to-School Plan for 2020-2021. This plan reiterates that school attendance is compulsory for all students in Québec.

Therefore, this plan calls for all students in preschool, elementary school and Secondary I, II and III to attend classes in person full-time; the standard educator/teacher-student ratios and the principle of stable groups will apply, and the health measures established by the public health authorities will be in effect. For students in Secondary IV and V, another option is available should full-time in-person attendance not be possible for logistical or health reasons: an alternating schedule where students are in class every second day and that includes distance learning and assignments to do at home.

Some students with a vulnerable state of health can be exempted from in-person attendance upon presentation of a doctor's note. Students with a parent or close relative with a specific medical condition and residing at the same address may also be eligible for this exemption. Teachers and professional staff will remain in contact with these students so that they can benefit from distance learning services, in light of their duly-documented medical condition.

## **New measures planned for back-to-school 2020-2021**

### **Wearing face coverings**

The **guidelines regarding mandatory face coverings** require some clarification for the education network based on various conditions and the type of institution.

#### **School staff**

Staff in all preschools, elementary and secondary schools, adult general education centres and vocational training centres is required to wear a face covering, except when they are in class, in the presence of students. Preschool staff is required to wear personal protective equipment in class, because it is not possible to respect physical distancing guidelines with students. Moreover, the staff is required to comply with the applicable occupational health and safety regulations.

#### ***Preschool and elementary school***

In elementary schools, students from preschool to Elementary 4, inclusive, are not required to wear a face covering; however, it is recommended. This also applies when using school transportation.<sup>1</sup>

All students in Elementary Cycle 3 (Elementary 5 and 6) must wear a face covering, except when they are in the presence only of students in their own class group or school staff. Therefore, students are required to wear face coverings when circulating in common areas of the school and when using school transportation or public transit.

#### ***Secondary school***

In secondary school, wearing a face covering is mandatory for all students, except when they are in the presence only of students in their own class group or school staff. Therefore, students are required to wear face coverings when circulating in common areas of the school and when using school transportation or public transit.<sup>1</sup>

It is the parents' responsibility to provide their children with face coverings. Please add this personal item not covered by free educational services to the list of supplies to purchase for back to school.

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<sup>1</sup>However, the standard of mandatory face coverings for riders age 12 and over remains applicable on public transit.

### ***Adult general education centres, vocational training centres and private educational institutions offering these services***

Students in adult general education and vocational training must wear a face covering, unless they are seated in a classroom arranged to ensure a 1.5 metre physical distance between students.<sup>2</sup> Face coverings are also mandatory in entrance halls, reception areas and elevators, for every individual aged 10 and older.

### ***Administrative centres***

Staff is also subject to the applicable occupational health and safety rules. Wearing a face covering is mandatory at all times in entrance halls, reception areas and elevators for all visitors and individuals aged 10 and older.

### ***Visitors in all educational institutions and administrative centers***

All visitors, including parents, are required to wear a face covering at all times, except when eating or drinking. Visitors are not required to wear a face covering when they are seated in a room designated for drama or arts performances (e.g. auditorium) and a physical distance of 1.5 m between spectators is maintained.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who accesses an educational institution in the evenings or on weekends (e.g. to participate in a physical activity) must wear a face covering, but may remove it for the duration of the activity if the activity so requires.

For more information, please see the table on mandatory face coverings in educational institutions, attached to this letter.

### **Other important information**

- “Face covering” is used to describe a well-fitted mask or fabric that covers the nose and mouth.
- Face coverings do not fall under free educational services. They are materials of personal use that must be provided by students. Students who do not have their face covering may be provided with a medical mask, on an exceptional basis.
- Staff members will be provided with face coverings.
- Students in preschool and Elementary Cycles One and Two, and individuals with a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a mask are not required to wear a face covering.

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<sup>2</sup> Face coverings are not required if the 1.5 metre distance is respected or if individuals reside in the same household or are accompanied by a person providing services or support.

<sup>3</sup> Face coverings are not required if the 1.5 metre distance is respected or if individuals reside in the same household or are accompanied by a person providing services or support.

When school staff is required to wear a medical mask, it is the employer's responsibility to provide its employees with the necessary protective equipment. The occupational health and safety rules that apply to the school network are detailed in the [Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the School System](#).

It is important to remember that these measures do not, in any way, replace or diminish the importance of continuing to follow the other guidelines issued by the public health authorities to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19.

We are aware that these health measures may require some adjustments to the daily routine in schools and may occasionally create some challenges. Above all, they have been implemented to protect your health and the health of students, thus ensuring you are provided with a safe working environment.

### **Detailed plans in case of another closure of educational institutions**

Over the summer, your school service centre has prepared an emergency protocol to be ready to quickly transition to distance learning in case of a complete or partial closure of schools.

In the first days of your return to work, the details of this protocol will be shared with you and the protocol will be updated based on your comments.

However, we would like to share with you some general information on this subject. Should educational institutions be forced to close again, it is planned that school staff continue working and students continue receiving the support they need to reach their full potential, including distance learning courses and regular follow-up. The goal is to enable students to continue learning. A document with clear guidelines has been sent to the school network.

Emergency daycare services will be quickly set up and made available to you should schools be forced to close a second time, and information technology tools will be provided if necessary.

### **A clear procedure in case of outbreaks**

In order to quickly react in case of an outbreak, we have also created a clear procedure for schools to follow if a student shows symptoms of or tests positive for COVID-19, or if multiple cases are detected in one or more classes. General information on this subject as well as other relevant information about back-to-school are also available at [Quebec.ca/back-to-school](http://Quebec.ca/back-to-school).

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

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

Finally, I would once again like to thank you for all the work you will put in over the coming weeks to ensure the success of this exceptional return to school.

As you know, our students need to return to class after many long months of confinement at home. In addition to sharing knowledge, at which you excel, the relationship you build with your students inspires them and plays a key role in their development and success. Your students need you.

We will not compromise on your health. Rest assured that we are making every effort to make sure that you can share your passion with your students, as you do every year, in complete safety. The return to school last spring, which allowed thousands of students to attend class without fuelling the pandemic, has proved that it is possible.

In conclusion, the coming school year will certainly have its share of challenges and surprises. Even if the situation has significantly improved since last March, the pandemic is not over. However, we are confident that by working together, and thanks to your commitment and competency, we will have a successful return to school for the benefit of our students.

Yours truly,

Jean-François Roberge  
Minister of Education

Encl.