

NEWS RELEASE

August 17, 2020

District Releases “A Safe Return to School” September Reopening Plan

The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District has released [A Safe Return to School](#), a comprehensive plan for school reopening in September. The plan was released today (Monday, August 17) via a virtual news conference and broadcast live to the public over the District’s YouTube channel.

The plan reflects the direction and guidance provided through the Provincial Government’s K-12 Education Re-entry Plan (July 6, 2020), and the most recent [Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) (August 14, 2020). It also provides school administrators, teachers, students and families with direction and information to help them prepare for school reopening.

“We are fortunate that our provincial rate of COVID-19 has been, and remains, very low,” said Goronwy Price, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the NLESD. “This allows us to implement a plan that sees all K-12 students return safely to in-class instruction in September, with enhanced health and safety protocols in effect.”

The primary purpose of the plan is to allow school administrators to make site-specific arrangements to guide teacher and student activities, based on public health advice, at the District’s more than 250 schools.

“Arrangements made for school re-entry will be different depending on the size and location of the school” said Tony Stack, CEO/Director of Education. “This District-level safe return plan will provide overarching guidance which will be common throughout the school system. Our highly capable school administrators, supported by District leadership, will develop site-specific arrangements that work for their building, and their students and staff. School-specific information for staff, students and families will be communicated by schools through their normal channels as it is available. To be successful, all of us involved in K-12 Education must be diligent in following medical advice and school-based safety protocols.”

Mr. Stack said common directives that relate to cleaning protocols, masks, busing, extra-curricular activities and more are based on medical advice and guided by the aforementioned Provincial Government documents. Information on some high impact directives is provided in the Backgrounder below. The District has also developed Frequently Asked Questions and

Answers which reflect current direction and advice. They are included in an [Information on September Reopening](#) section on the District website.

Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health, attended today's announcement to speak to public health advice and protocols which have informed the plan.

"Managing COVID-19 has always been about weighing potential risks and harm against the benefits of our actions," said Dr. Fitzgerald. "Right now, in our province, we must consider that the harms posed to children by an ongoing absence from school are outweighing the harms presented by COVID-19. In these unprecedented times, our school communities can provide a source of normalcy for our children and youth. While there will be changes in the learning environments to ensure everyone's health and safety, what will be the same will be the familiar faces to greet them and the support to help them return to the school setting."

"A Safe Return to School" is a living document, and specifics may be adjusted depending on the evolution of the COVID-19 situation in the province, and any changes to Provincial Government directives and medical advice.

The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District represents about 64,000 students, over 8,200 employees and more than 250 schools throughout the province.

Links:

- [Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)
- [A Safe Return to School - NLESD September Reopening Plan](#)
- [Information on September Reopening](#) - NLESD Webpage
- [Provincial Government COVID-19 Information](#) - Provincial Government Webpage
- [Parent School Screening Questionnaire](#)

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BACKGROUNDER

The low prevalence of COVID-19 in the province has enabled the Newfoundland and Labrador School District to reopen its schools in September, with enhanced health and safety protocols in place. Based on Provincial Government directives, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools, there are a number of changes that are required to be implemented at this time. These are referenced in the Public Health Guidelines and included in the District's plan. They include, but are not limited to:

Cleaning Protocols

- The District has hired additional custodial staff and adjusted their duties to maximize hours spent on cleaning.
- After school each day, the building will be cleaned and disinfected, to ensure it is prepared for use the next day. Each high touch surface (door knobs, handrails, faucets, etc.) will be sanitized minimally twice during the school day.
- In the (possible) absence of cafeteria space, desktops will be used for eating as well as school work. Therefore, at the end of each day, all student desktops in use will be thoroughly cleaned.
- Public health officials have approved the school cleaning protocol.

Physical Distancing

- There are many sparsely populated school buildings in which physical distancing will not pose a challenge (i.e., there are about 100 schools with average class sizes of 15 or fewer).
- In larger schools, and particularly in high schools where students are enrolled in multiple courses, maintaining class cohorts and strict physical distancing is more challenging, and may not be possible in some cases.
- The Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Guidelines for K-12 Schools indicate that if a two-metre physical distance cannot be maintained between cohorts at all times, physical distancing is encouraged "to the greatest extent possible and, "where physical distancing is not possible, desks should be arranged to achieve the greatest distancing possible". NLESD schools will adhere to this recommendation.

Masks

- Based on the current low prevalence of COVID-19 in Newfoundland and Labrador, the province's public health guidelines indicated students do not need to wear a mask while in classrooms.
- Masks will be required on school buses.
- Masks will also be required in communal areas of the school for high school students and staff, and for junior high school students if cohorts change classes.
- However no student is required to wear a mask if they cannot tolerate it.

- Public health guidelines indicate this will be closely monitored and if there is a change in epidemiology or evidence regarding COVID-19, the recommendation may change. Further information is available in [Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#).

Student Transportation

- The medical advice provided to the District is that there should be no more than two students to a seat on a school bus. Effectively, this means a bus which used to carry a maximum of 63-72 students can now carry only 46.
- There are not enough available school buses to make up this disparity. Many buses already do “double runs” to pick up students.
- Therefore, there will be students who would normally be eligible to ride the bus who will no longer be able to do so. The District will provide service to the first 46 eligible students assigned to the current school bus run, based on morning bus stop order. Others will have to make their own transportation arrangements.
- All ‘courtesy seating’ arrangements will also be suspended at this time which, in turn, means there will be no requirement for previously established ‘courtesy stops’ within the 1.6 km school bus eligibility zone.
- Students who qualify for alternate transportation arrangements will continue to have access.

Extra-curricular Activities

- When school opens, outdoor activities will be permitted, however, extra-curricular activities will be assessed for the month of September to enable the District to evaluate implementation of current protocols and assess any potential issues.
- Student groups will not be permitted to meet after school hours inside their school until further notice. They may wish, for example, to collaborate online with their peers until restrictions are lifted.
- Outdoor extracurricular programs may operate with approved sports (as determined by the District) following their sport governing body COVID-19 protocols. For more information see [Protocol for Extra-curricular Activities](#).
- Educators have been provided with guidance and strategies to support music education during COVID-19 and will continue to be guided by public health with respect to extra-curricular activities.