

NEWS RELEASE

February 4, 2021

District Clarifies Rationale for ElectionsNL Use of Some Schools

The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District is clarifying some public misunderstanding around the rationale involved in complying with an ElectionsNL request to utilize some schools for polling stations in the upcoming provincial election.

“First and foremost, this is a one-time event that does not constitute a ‘gathering’ of people attending an event for an extended period of time,” said Goronwy Price, Chair of the Board of Trustees for the District. “There would be a small number of ElectionsNL personnel on hand during the day, and individual voters filing through the designated polling area - physically distanced and masked - for a short period of time.

“This is not the same as typical in-school graduation events or sports activities involving larger groups of people gathering in a location for longer periods,” Mr. Price added. “The District has already advised schools that if we can hold Covid-19 at bay, and in-class instruction continues, we can plan for indoor school-leaving events for the Class of 2021. As of this date, however, those in-school events cannot include visitors. If that changes, we will adapt.”

Tony Stack, CEO/Director of Education, said Elections NL contacted the District indicating it required additional infrastructure for polling stations this year, given Covid-19 considerations. The District ultimately agreed to assist, given the extenuating circumstances, provided Public Health-approved safety protocols were put in place - including mask wearing, physical distancing and having voters enter, vote, and depart through designated entrance and exit points, without any time spent lingering in the polling area.

The request involved the use of just over 50 schools throughout the province - most of which are in communities where there are no other, or not enough, suitable locations available (e.g., ample parking, access for the disabled). As it was later determined, the election is being held on Saturday, February 13, so there will be no instructional staff or students required to be in the schools. Fewer than 10 locations will also be available for advance polling on Saturday, February 6. Access to schools will be limited to the polling areas (e.g., gymnasiums). ElectionsNL has its own suite of health and safety protocols, and District custodians will be on hand all day Saturday (and on Sunday, if deemed necessary) to facilitate cleaning as per established health and safety protocols for schools approved by Public Health. The Chief Medical Officer of Health has publicly stated she believes schools can be safely used as polling stations.

After a 36-hour period, schools will be ready to welcome students and staff on Monday as usual.

“Our focus has been, and continues to be, on keeping schools open to provide in-class instruction and in-school extra-curricular activities which benefit student health and well-being,” said Mr. Stack. “We have worked hard to maintain public health protocols within our buildings, and will continue to do so. We have only to look at other jurisdictions to see how fortunate we have been, and how quickly that can change.”

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Media contact:

Heather May | Director of Strategic Planning, Policy and Communications | O: 709-758-2371 |
M: 709-690-0056 | heathermay@nlesd.ca | [@NLESDCA](https://twitter.com/NLESDCA) | www.nlesd.ca