

Effective Date: August 27, 2020

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It is that time of year where we are preparing for back to school. It can be both a time of excitement and stress for parents, caregivers, care providers, children and youth. There has been considerable work done to prepare for a successful return to school in this COVID-19 environment. BC has recently announced its Return to School plans, MCFD and Ministry of Education will continue to collaborate to support a successful return to school this year.

School is an important part of a child/youth's social support system and teachers and school personnel play a protective and supportive role for children and youth. MCFD supports and promotes children/youth returning to school based on the guidance and advice of the Provincial Health Officer. Most children will be able to attend school safely in person and this is the preferred option for children and youth in care (CYIC).

Social workers should:

- Review with the child/youth circle of support/care team to discuss return to school planning where necessary.
- Ensure children and youth have the appropriate masks, wipes, sanitizer, school supplies.
- Work with caregivers to support the familiarization and practice of mask wearing for children/youth who are required to in school.
- Be engaged with the school and circle of support/care team to discuss options for children and youth who may not be able to safely attend school in-person.
- Work directly with the child/youth's circle of support to ensure that their disabilities/diverse abilities or capacity to physically distance does not exclude them from being included at school or in learning groups.
- Work with the child/youths' circle of support/care team inclusive of the school district, school, parents and caregivers where students have immune compromised health concerns and are unable to attend in person. Students will need a note from a medical professional, to access at home learning programs through the school district.
- Work directly with school personnel to resolve any issues. If unable to resolve the issue with school personnel, concerns should, in consultation with your team leader, be directed to the school district and Superintendent.
- Connect directly with parents of children and youth in care by agreement to discuss their child's school needs.

Resource social workers should:

- Connect directly with caregivers to ensure they have the information and resources they need to support children and youth placed in their homes have a smooth return to school.
- Connect with caregivers to discuss the needs of the children and youth placed in their home and to discuss any anxieties or barriers in the home for children and youth to return to school.
- Recommend that caregivers begin back to school preparation routines in their home.

- Ensure caregivers know where to get the local education and school district updates and information (See information and links below).
- Ensure caregivers have the appropriate masks, wipes, sanitizer, and school supplies for children and youth.
- Understand their local school district protocols and expectations for daily health checks.
- Discuss the Trauma Informed Practice resources available to families and caregivers.

The following information provides a summary overview of Return to School information that is available of the [Ministry of Education Website](#). Please provide families, caregivers and youth with the website links.

Guidelines from School Districts:

- Operational Guidelines for School Districts have been released.
 - All school district plans will be available online after August 26th.
- Return to class will begin the week of Sept 8-11th.
 - To ensure a safe, ready and welcome restart, an orientation week during Sept 8th-11th will help students, teachers and staff adjust to their new routines, find out about their learning groups, and practice safety protocols.
 - Students return on Sept 10th – for latest information please refer to Ministry of Education web or local school district website.
 - [Ministry of Education Website](#)
 - [Open School BC Website](#)

Alternatives to in-person learning offered to students.

Attending schools in person is the preferred option for children in care. If, after assessing the child's circumstances the child's guardianship worker determines that the child cannot safely attend school the following options are available:

- **B.C.'s Distributed Learning (DL)** programs provide an alternative pathway for students to learn outside of a regular classroom setting. Students can enroll in distributed schools outside their home district. Students enrolled in public distributed learning classes are connected to a teacher for the course of the class, term, or year.
 - Although there was indication that Distance learning opportunities were full, the Ministry of Education has addressed this, and you can expect that school districts will not be limiting the number seats occupied by students with special needs. Distance learning seats are either at full capacity and able to take any further students (regardless of support needs) or not.
- **Homebound education** services allows students to continue their education program if they are absent from class during the school year because of injury, illness, surgery, pregnancy or mental health reasons. To access homebound education services, parents and caregivers must contact their school.

Homeschooling is an alternative method of teaching offered outside the B.C. educational system. More information on the differences between traditional homeschooling, public school distributed learning and independent school distributed learning is available here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/classroom-alternatives/homeschooling>

Homeschooling comes with great responsibility – choosing this option means caregivers must provide and supervise the child’s entire educational program, including curriculum and learning materials. Children/youth in a homeschool program may not be eligible to receive a BC Dogwood Graduation certificate.

If after assessing the child’s circumstances the child’s guardianship worker recommends one of these options for a child in care, the request must be made to the Director of Operations or Manager for approval. Factors to consider in approving one of these options are:

- The child/youth’s needs, views and best interests;
- If the child/youth is in care by agreement, the parent’s views;
- The caregiver’s needs and views;
- The health of the caregivers and others in the child/youth’s home
- Supports that can offered by the school in accordance with the guidance and recommendations of the Provincial Health Officer
- The challenges and benefits for the child/youth and caregivers of alternatives to in-class learning

More information on the differences between traditional homeschooling, public school distributed learning and independent school distributed learning is available here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/classroom-alternatives/homeschooling>

Masks:

Ministry of Education is purchasing 1.5 million masks – that’s two for each staff and student in each public school. Canadian Shield has also donated 54,500 thousand face shields that will be provided to schools as well. Students are not required to wear a mask when within their cohort of students, however will need to wear a mask when they move outside that cohort e.g. Going to the library, moving in the hall ways, on the school bus.

School Attendance:

Ministry of Education shared they are trying to send a firm message that schools will be in session and acknowledge that all students are required to be in school by law. They encourage families to stay connected to Ministry of Education and school district web information. If families are choosing to not send their children to school, they need to choose one of the other two options; online/Distance learning or register their child as a home schooler.

Choosing not to send children and youth to school in itself is not grounds for needing protection or making a report. However, lack of school attendance in combination with indicators of abuse or neglect may require an assessment and/or child protective response.

Students with Complex Medical Conditions:

Guardianship social workers and caregivers of students who are immune-compromised or have underlying medical conditions are encouraged to consult with their health care provider to determine their level of risk regarding return to school.

If a medical professional determines that a student cannot attend school due to their health risks, the school district will work with the family to review alternative learning options for the student.

- Students who need to stay at home because they are immune-compromised will have an at-home learning plan and will be provided with an educational program by their school district
- This may include providing assistive technologies to help students learn remotely

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

If you have any questions, please contact your Practice Analyst or Director of Practice.