

August 4, 2020

Dear Edmonton Public School families,

COVID-19 has made the past few months very difficult for many families in our city. The quick shut down of in-person classes and change to distance learning had never happened in Alberta. We recognize how difficult this was for students, staff and families – to try to keep up with learning while still working, caring for loved ones and struggling with the many other realities this pandemic has brought with it. We hope that you are well. We thank you for your support over the past months.

Edmonton Public Schools' first priority is always our students and staff. We are committed to offering the best learning environment possible for our 107,000 students and over 10,000 staff.

The provincial government asked us to prepare for three different re-entry scenarios. We have been working on the plans for the past several months. This work has been challenging - what we know about COVID-19 changes often, our schools are very full, and we have less money and staff to work with. While we got more money from the province this year than last, it is still less than we received in 2018-19. We also have 6,000 more students than we did two years ago. This means we have about six per cent less funding per student for the 2020-21 school year.

On July 21<sup>st</sup>, the provincial government [announced](#) that schools in Alberta will re-open under scenario 1, a “near-normal” return to classes. The ideal situation is to have students in school, to learn with their teachers and peers. But, students and staff should be welcomed back to classrooms in the safest possible way.

Our staff have been hard at work to find the best way to lessen risk while still having a caring, consistent learning environment. Today, we released [our re-entry strategy](#) for scenario 1. We are proud of the work to prepare to open schools under scenario 1. It gives as much choice as possible for families and staff to choose distance learning options. We understand that not everyone can make this choice. Our staff will do everything possible to reduce risk, but we are concerned that the province's re-entry plan does not include the support we need to have physical distancing in our classrooms. To properly physically distance students in classrooms, we would require significant additional funding for staff and space to accommodate students.

Because it is not possible to physically distance in all of our classrooms, we have decided that all staff and students who can physically, developmentally and psychologically wear a face covering must do so. This is in addition to the province's decision to mandate masks for grades 4-12 in common areas. Our decision adds an extra measure of protection for everyone in our classrooms. We are also asking the government to invest the hundreds of millions of dollars needed to open schools with smaller classes and physical distancing.

If the province decides not to invest the dollars needed for physical distancing in classrooms, we asked for the following to strengthen our division's current re-entry plan:

- \$30 million dollars to hire additional staff to assist with online learning or teach smaller cohorts of students, including students who require specialized supports, and additional custodial time required for extra cleaning in response to COVID-19.
- Provincial funding for childcare so that caregivers can continue to work if in-class time is reduced due to increased physical distancing measures, a move to scenario 2, or if families need to choose distance learning.
- Provincial funding for in-home supports for students with special needs who require in-person supports but are unable to attend school in-person.

In the meantime, we will be using our reserve funds to pay for added cleaning for schools and buses, personal protective equipment like masks and face shields for staff, and supply staff costs. Our re-entry strategy does the very best job possible with the resources we have available. However, our reserves are not enough to meet the need.

We are speaking up about the provincial plan because parents have asked us to. We see other provincial governments helping cover the costs of re-entry. We need our provincial government to do the same. We will keep expressing our concerns with the provincial plan for school re-entry and keep asking for the funding and flexibility we need to return to classes with less risk and more care for vulnerable students and staff.

We are very proud of this plan and our staff, who have shown determination, resolve and care for our students in a very uncertain time. This plan is a testament to the work of our staff. Edmonton Public Schools will be doing our best for you next year.

The coming weeks will be full of conversation about the best ways we can support your family. We know that there are many difficult decisions ahead. Your child's school will soon release specific protocols to reduce risk and care for students in your school. If you have questions about the protocols Edmonton Public Schools will be releasing, and options for online learning, please reach out to your principal.

If you have concerns about the provincial plan for re-entry, we encourage you to reach out to the Ministry of Education.

If you have questions about this letter, reach out to your Trustee.

Board of Trustees, Edmonton Public Schools

