

DATE: March 9, 2021

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Impact on the Division from January 27 to February 23, 2021

ORIGINATOR: Karen Mills, Director Board and Superintendent Relations

RESOURCE

STAFF: Laurie Barnstable, Anna Batchelor, Megan Normandeau, Carrie Rosa

REFERENCE: January 12, 2021 Caucus Committee meeting

ISSUE

The Board of Trustees are receiving ongoing verbal and written updates on the Division's efforts to support students and staff and mitigate transmission during the COVID-19 pandemic. Trustees have asked that information be shared regularly at public Board meetings.

BACKGROUND

Information reports about the impact of COVID-19 on the Division were presented at the November 24, 2020 and February 9, 2021 Board meetings. Every weekday, updates on the number of COVID-19 cases in schools are provided to Trustees via a transmittal memo, to students and families via a [page](#) on the Division website, and to media via a direct report. Each week, the Superintendent emails an update to all staff.

Division schools continue to do everything they can to mitigate risk by following safety guidelines outlined in the Government of Alberta's school re-entry plan and our Division's Re-entry Strategy. This includes: screening for illness, handwashing and sanitizing, physical distancing where possible, enhanced cleaning standards, strict illness protocols, personal protective equipment (PPE), masks and cohorts.

CURRENT SITUATION

There continues to be incidences of COVID-19 cases in our schools. In the last month, case numbers have been steadily [decreasing](#). From January 27 to February 23, 2021:

- We received notice that 90 individuals in the Division tested positive for COVID-19
- 52 out of 215 schools had COVID-19 cases
- 2,200 students were recommended or required to quarantine
- 264 staff were recommended or required to quarantine

Transition to online learning at Steele Heights School

Following approval from Alberta Education, in-person learners at Steele Heights School transitioned to online learning for one week on February 8, 2021. Eight cases of COVID-19 were reported in the school since January 25, 2021 and approximately 251 students and 11 staff members were asked to quarantine. The transition to online learning supported safety, continuity of learning and school operations, preventing the need to rearrange and mix class cohorts for the small number of in-person learners who had not been asked to quarantine. Students returned to in-person learning on February 16, 2021, following the Family Day long weekend.

Aceso Medical COVID-19 testing for staff members

The Division continues to offer COVID-19 testing for staff members through Aceso Medical. As of February 23, 2021, Aceso Medical has completed 3,610 COVID-19 tests for the Division.

When a staff member requests a test, they are usually contacted within 30 minutes of Aceso Medical receiving the request. Testing is done at a central site or through a mobile testing unit, and typically occurs on the same day the test request was made. If the staff member requires the mobile testing unit to come to their home, testing may occur on the day following the request, depending on the time of the request and mobile unit capacity.

As of February 23, 2021, the Division has spent \$175,873.43 for the testing program. The federal *Safe Return to Class Fund* has been used to cover these costs. The Division set aside approximately \$750,000 in federal funding for the testing program. Based on a review of expenditures as of February 23, 2021, we anticipate a total expenditure of no more than \$500,000 for this service.

All staff who report COVID-19 symptoms need to get a test before returning to work. The Aceso Medical testing program supports staff by providing access to tests and results as soon as possible. The Division recognizes how important it is for our students to have a continuous learning experience.

Creativity and resilience in Division schools

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged schools to reinvent traditional practices and constantly adapt to new challenges and changes. Staff and students have shown creativity and resilience in their teaching and learning throughout the school year. Division principals shared examples of this outstanding work:

- Teachers are embracing technology and trying new initiatives and platforms (online reading buddies, virtual holiday concerts, virtual open houses) and expanding their own learning to provide a more enriching experience for students.
- Teachers are planning outdoor activities, making use of outdoor spaces, trying new activities (snowshoeing, shelter building) and making connections between nature and curriculum for students.
- Conversations around mental health are intentional, with frequent check-ins for staff and students, purposeful conversations and access to supports.
- Librarians are finding new ways to support COVID-19 appropriate book exchanges, online reservations and portable libraries.
- Schools are trying new team-building activities, including socially-distanced friendly competitions like snowman building, costume contests, social media challenges and theme days across cohorts.
- The adjustment to virtual assemblies has made it possible for schools to connect with people around the world.
- Music teachers are using digital music composition and body percussion in lieu of singing.
- Foods teachers are planning elaborate lessons (meals with multiple courses, sushi, extravagant desserts) using the extra time the quarterly system has provided in the timetable.

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