

*COVID-19 strategy*

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2021–2022

# Back to School Plan

*August 16, 2021*



EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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# Message from the Superintendent

Parents, families and guardians,

Edmonton Public Schools looks forward to welcoming back more than 106,000 students for the 2021–22 school year. September is an exciting time—a new chapter and fresh start for our students, families and staff. Unchanged is our focus on high-quality teaching and learning in environments that keep everyone as safe as possible.

On August 13, the Government of Alberta [announced further details about returning to school this year](#) and released its [Guidance for Respiratory Illness Prevention and Management in Schools](#). With the availability of vaccines, the province has indicated it will be a normal return to school this fall.

Provincial direction and feedback from families have helped determine what the start of the school year will look like for our Division.

Last year, families told us they felt safe sending their children to learn in person during the pandemic because we had specific health and safety measures in place in schools, like regular hand washing, wearing masks, staying home when sick, and extra cleaning.

You'll be familiar with many of the school routines and safety strategies that are in place again this school year. We will continue to monitor information available to the Division and adjust our plan throughout the year, as we look forward to returning to a near-normal school environment.

As we prepare to welcome our students and staff back to in-person and online learning in September, we continue to be guided by three key themes:

- safety
- family choice
- high-quality teaching and learning

## **Safety first**

Edmonton Public Schools will continue to use a range of safety strategies that work together to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. These strategies include:

- requiring the use of masks for all students and staff
- daily health screening for students and staff before coming to school
- a stay-at-home protocol for those who are sick
- enhanced cleaning and disinfecting in schools and on yellow buses
- encouraging physical distancing where possible
- creating cohorts of students where possible
- hand hygiene requirements for students and staff
- partnering with Alberta Health to host vaccination clinics in schools

We based these measures on what we know about COVID-19 right now, including highly-transmissible variants of concern, with the safety of students and staff at heart. We intend to revisit these measures throughout the year, in response to changing public health information, such as vaccination rates.

We are looking forward to bringing back many of the events and activities that help make schools an engaging, fun and enriching environment for students. The wearing of masks provides a layer of safety that will enable us to do so much sooner.

**Family choice**

Our Division will continue to offer families a choice between in-person and online learning for the first half of the school year. Our goal is to ensure all students receive a high-quality education, no matter what option they choose.

It's our sincerest hope that we will be able to bring all students back to in-person learning for the second half of the school year.

**High-quality teaching and learning**

Just as we do every fall, teachers will be assessing students to confirm where they are at in their learning, with a focus on literacy and numeracy growth. This information will help teachers meet students where they are at in their individual learning journey and inform programming.

Similar to how we approached learning last year, we are coordinating in-person and online teaching to make sure students across the Division learn outcomes from the curriculum at the same time during the school year. This will reduce possible disruptions that are caused by the pandemic and support our anticipated transition to in-person learning for all students in the second semester.

**Every school is different**

Our Division has more than 200 schools, each with unique student needs, grade levels and learning spaces. You'll notice parts of the plan offer flexibility for local, school-based decisions. Working with their staff, families and students, each school will determine how to move forward this year under the direction and guidance of our plan to create a safe school community focused on high-quality teaching and learning.

**Shared responsibility**

I know that throughout the year, we will continue to work together to keep one another safe.

It's a responsibility we all take seriously. We are looking forward to welcoming our students and staff back and to another exciting school year.

**Darrel Robertson**

*Superintendent of Schools*  
Edmonton Public Schools

# What to expect in 2021–22

*In mid-August, the Government of Alberta released its directions for returning to school in 2021–22.*

As more Albertans get vaccinated, the [Government of Alberta announced](#) it is lifting many health restrictions, and the province is signalling school Divisions can work toward a normal return to school.

Alberta Health and Alberta Education will continue to monitor COVID-19 information as they decide how to best keep students, staff and the broader community safe.

This means that, at any point during the school year, the province could change the required health measures for schools across Alberta, schools in a particular region, or individual schools and classrooms.

The province has said that individual school authorities may choose to put additional health measures in place, such as physical distancing, cohorts and masking.

We will continue to monitor our plan throughout the year, based on provincial direction and the COVID-19 situation in Alberta.

The Government of Alberta has planned **two contingency scenarios** in case the COVID-19 pandemic impacts the education system:

### Scenario 1: In-school classes

(near normal with enhanced health measures)

- School authorities must implement routine measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses
- Additional public health recommendations for student learning and extracurricular activities for those unable to receive immunizations
- Outbreak management and interventions similar to influenza outbreak response

### Scenario 2: At-home learning

(in-school classes are suspended/cancelled)

- School authorities will offer at-home learning opportunities to students
- Schools will work with families to ensure student learning continues
- Teachers will continue to assess student progress
- Continue to follow the public health measures in place

More information about the provincial contingency scenarios is included in the Government of Alberta's [2021–2022 School Year Plan](#).

To support families, the province has also released a [parents' guide for the 2021–22 school year](#).

Edmonton Public Schools developed this 2021–22 Back to School Plan so families know what to expect in our schools.

Our strategy follows provincial requirements and may exceed those requirements when we feel that extra precautions are necessary to reduce risk in our school communities.

**In circumstances where this strategy exceeds provincial requirements, schools will adhere to the guidelines in this document.**

Each school in our Division will follow this strategy, so families have clear understanding of what things will look like in the 2021–2022 school year.

Our strategy is developed around three key themes:

- ✓ **safety**
- ✓ **family choice**
- ✓ **high-quality teaching and learning**

# Safety and well-being

*The safety and well-being of staff, students and families continues to be our priority for the 2021–22 school year.*

Protecting each other is a shared responsibility—we all have a role to play in following the safety protocols set out by the province and the Division. These protocols are intended to reduce the risk of COVID-19, but do not eliminate all risks.

The Division's 2021–22 Back to School Plan focuses on many safety strategies that work together to support the safest environment possible within the complex dynamics of a school community.

These strategies include:

- mandatory wearing of masks
- cohorts where possible
- physical distancing where possible
- staying home while sick
- handwashing and sanitizing
- cleaning guidelines
- screening for illness
- using personal protective equipment (PPE) where required
- working with Alberta Health to host vaccination clinics in schools

## Cohorts

A cohort is a group of students and staff who remain together.

Division schools will group Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 6 students together in cohorts as a safety strategy, since children under 12 are currently not eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations. A student's assigned class will be considered their cohort.

Junior high and high schools will examine cohorting as a strategy when they organize for instruction.

## Physical distancing

The Division will continue to physically distance students wherever possible. Schools will promote physical distancing throughout their buildings, including in classrooms, hallways, washrooms and common areas. This may include:

- removing and rearranging seating in common areas
- staggering the times that classes start and end to prevent crowded hallways
- assigning specific doors to students for entry and exit
- managing hallways to promote the flow of foot traffic and physical distancing

## Screening for illness

Before coming to school each day, families must complete the COVID-19 [Alberta Health daily checklist for students and children under 18](#) to determine whether they can attend or should stay home.

Staff must complete the [Alberta Health daily checklist for adults](#) before coming to work. Families and staff are not required to submit the checklist to the school. It is a tool to assess wellness.

All visitors must also complete the Alberta Health daily checklist before entering the school.

**Students, staff or visitors who feel ill or have any symptoms of COVID-19 cannot enter the school. Anyone who tests positive or has symptoms of COVID-19 must follow [Alberta's isolation requirements](#).**

**Families are reminded to contact the school office if your child is staying home sick.**

**Government requirements – symptoms or testing positive for COVID-19**

*I have symptoms and*

a positive test result	<p><b>Isolate:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for at least 10 days or until symptoms have improved, <b>and</b></li> <li>• until you have no fever for 24 hours, without using fever-reducing medications <i>whichever is longer</i>.</li> </ul>
a negative test result	Stay home until your symptoms are gone.
I am a <b>student</b> who has not been tested	<p><b>If you are a student</b> and your symptoms include <b>fever, cough, shortness of breath</b> or <b>loss of sense of taste/smell</b>, <b>isolate:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for at least 10 days or until symptoms have improved, <b>and</b></li> <li>• until you have no fever for 24 hours, without using fever-reducing medications <i>whichever is longer</i>.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>A student may have other symptoms (such as <b>chills, sore throat/painful swallowing, runny nose/congestion, feeling unwell/fatigued, nausea/vomiting/diarrhea, unexplained loss of appetite, muscle/joint aches, headache</b> or <b>conjunctivitis</b>).</p> <p>If you have <b>one</b> of these other symptoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stay home and monitor for 24 hours. If your symptom improves, return to school when you feel well enough. (Testing is not necessary).</li> </ul> <p>If you have <b>two symptoms</b> or <b>one symptom</b> that persists or worsens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stay home until symptom(s) are gone. (Testing is recommended but not required).</li> </ul>
I am an <b>adult</b> who has not been tested	<p><b>If you are an adult</b> and symptoms include <b>fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat</b> or <b>runny nose</b>, <b>isolate:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for at least 10 days or until symptoms have improved, <b>and</b></li> <li>• until you have no fever for 24 hours, without using fever-reducing medications <i>whichever is longer</i>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Adults</b> who have other symptoms should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stay home until symptoms are gone.</li> </ul>

*I do not have symptoms and*

have a positive test result	<b>Isolate</b> for at least 10 days from the date that you were tested (when the sample was collected).
have a negative test result	You do not need to isolate.

Screening for illness is a key strategy to slow down or stop the spread of COVID-19.

**Staying home when sick remains an important way to care for those around us.**

### Students with pre-existing conditions

Families should tell their school about any pre-existing conditions their child has and the related symptoms. This helps school staff recognize the difference between these symptoms and symptoms that are a sign of illness.

### Showing signs of illness while at school

If a student or staff member becomes ill during the school day, they will need to leave the school immediately or move to the school's sickroom.

When a student is sick, they will wear a mask if they can do so safely. School staff who supervise the student will also wear a mask and will:

- bring the student to the school sickroom,
- contact parents or guardians to pick up their child immediately, and
- follow Division safety strategies around personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning and disinfecting the area and school sickroom.

If a parent or guardian cannot pick up their child, the student will remain in the school sickroom until dismissal.

**Anyone who tests positive or has symptoms of COVID-19 must follow [Alberta's isolation requirements](#).** Learn more about isolation requirements and screening for illness on pages 6 and 7.

### If there is a case of COVID-19 at school

As the school year starts, the province has indicated that schools will not be informed about individual cases of COVID-19.

Staff and students may choose to notify a school about a positive COVID-19 test, but it is not required.

If we receive notification about a positive case from Alberta Health Services in a school, we will communicate with the school community.

Quarantine is not required for close contacts under current provincial direction. **This means classes will not be required to quarantine if there is a case of COVID-19 at school. Individuals who test positive will be expected to quarantine based on the provincial requirements in place at that time.**

If there is an outbreak of any respiratory illness, including COVID-19, at a school, the Division will work with Alberta Health Services to share information with the school community.

Schools will continue to report an absence rate of 10 per cent or higher to Alberta Health Services. This helps health officials monitor for a variety of illnesses—such as clusters of respiratory and gastrointestinal illness—and alerts Alberta Health Services to possible outbreaks.



### Handwashing and sanitizing

Everyone who enters a school will be required to use hand sanitizer or wash their hands immediately.

Students and staff will be required to wash and/or sanitize their hands throughout the day, including:

- every time they enter or exit the school
- before they enter classrooms
- before and after they use shared equipment
- before eating

Schools will provide hand sanitizer throughout the building to support these requirements. Families are also encouraged to send their children to school with personal hand sanitizer.

### Cleaning guidelines

All schools will continue to follow COVID-19 cleaning guidelines. These guidelines include enhanced measures such as:

- purchasing recommended COVID-19 cleaning supplies
- training for custodial staff
- removing excess furniture or items that cannot be cleaned easily on a regular basis
- frequently cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces such as water fountains and door handles
- more frequent cleaning and disinfecting throughout the school, with specific attention to washrooms, high-traffic areas and classrooms

### Ventilation

Proper ventilation and airflow is one of many ways we are maintaining safe learning spaces for staff and students this year.

All of our schools meet or exceed recommendations from the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) in relation to COVID-19. We will continue to adapt to any changes to the ASHRAE guidelines throughout the year.

In our schools, this means:

- using the highest grade filters possible
- more frequent filter changes scheduled throughout the year
- maximizing airflow and fresh air intake
- extending running time for mechanical systems by four hours during school days
- mechanical systems are inspected on an ongoing basis throughout the year

### **All Division buildings have mechanical systems that allow for fresh air intake.**

When weather allows, we encourage schools to open classroom windows and use outdoor learning spaces.

### Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Not all forms of PPE are required for all staff, but additional PPE is important when:

- it is part of plans to support students with special needs who require complex medical supports
- custodial staff require PPE to support their work cleaning and disinfecting

### Masks

#### Wearing masks at school

Masks are an important way to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19, especially now as Alberta is still working toward all eligible individuals being fully vaccinated and children under 12 cannot yet be vaccinated. In our Division Survey this spring, 96 per cent of students, 92 per cent of parents and 96 per cent of staff indicated that masks were important for feeling safe.

Masks will also enable us to more quickly reintroduce many events that were postponed throughout the pandemic. With the extra level of safety that masks provide, we can reintroduce such things as field trips, volunteers and special in-person events.

To begin the school year, **all staff and students in Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 will be required to wear a mask while in our buildings.**

Throughout the school year, Edmonton Public Schools will monitor health information and data related to the pandemic to help determine our ability to safely ease the use of masks for some or all students.

Some important things to know about the use of masks are:

- individuals who are physically, psychologically or developmentally unable to wear a mask, and those who cannot wear one for reasons under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, may be excused from this health protocol—families should talk with their school principal if this applies to their child
- masks are required for staff who are wearing face shields
- masks will be an important item on school supply lists for families

### Vaccination

Receiving two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine is an essential strategy to keep each other safe.



Currently, vaccines are available for all Albertans 12 and older. All Albertans are encouraged to book a vaccination appointment through their local health care provider.

To increase people's access to COVID-19 vaccines, the provincial government announced immunizations will be available through temporary clinics in schools for students in Grades 7–12, staff and community members. Parent or guardian consent will be required for students who wish to participate.

The Division will work with Alberta Health to host these clinics.

The province does not require proof of vaccination to attend school in Alberta. For more information about vaccination policies and requirements, contact [Alberta Health Services](#).

“ The most important thing that adults and older children can do to protect themselves and others is to be fully immunized. Vaccines are safe and effective and protect against severe illness and outcomes. Together we are building a protective shield around those for whom the vaccine is not yet available. ”

— Dr. Deena Hinshaw,  
Chief Medical Officer of Health

# What school will look like

*We look forward to welcoming students and staff back into our classrooms in 2021–22. The safety and well-being of our students, families and staff is a priority as we return to school.*

We want to help students, families and staff understand how schools will operate and let them know what to expect for the 2021–22 school year.

## The first day of school

Each school will determine their schedule for the start of the school year. Some schools may choose to use a staggered schedule where students come in at an assigned time to meet their teachers and receive information about the school year. Families should watch for information from their school and check SchoolZone for school startup information.

Families who have chosen online learning for the start of the school year will hear from the Division about what the first few days of school will look like.

## Arriving and leaving school

Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 6 schools will assign doors for students to use when they enter and exit the school.

When arriving at school students will:

- go to the area outside their assigned door
- follow physical distancing guidelines to stay at least two metres apart while they wait outside
- follow physical distancing guidelines to line up when it is time to enter the school
- wait for staff to bring them into the school

School staff will be outside to help students.

Grades 7–12 schools may also assign doors to support traffic flow of students entering and leaving school.

Schools may develop staggered schedules at the start and end of the school day to limit how many students enter or exit the school at once. This schedule may be **slightly** different from the regular bell schedule.

During extreme weather, such as severe cold or rain, schools will have a plan in place.

Adults who bring students to school will be asked to stay in their vehicle or maintain an appropriate physical distance on the edge of the school grounds. Those who need to enter the school must book an appointment with the school office.

Parents and guardians of children with complex needs who require support to enter the building should contact their school office in late August. Staff will work to develop a plan that is safe.

## Hand sanitizer and handwashing

As soon as students enter the school, they will be required to use hand sanitizer or immediately wash their hands. Schools will create plans to support hand hygiene by considering washroom locations, the number of students entering the school and other relevant factors. Students will also be required to use hand sanitizer again before they enter their classroom and prior to eating food.

Schools will provide hand sanitizer throughout the building to support these requirements. Families are also encouraged to send their children to school with personal hand sanitizer.

### Lockers

Schools may reintroduce the use of lockers. Schools will work with their staff, students and families to determine what this could look like for their school community. Schools choosing to use lockers will need to ensure proper cleaning protocols are in place.

Students can store their belongings in their assigned locker during the school day. Due to daily cleaning of lockers, students will be required to take their belongings home at the end of each day.

### Boot racks and coat hooks

Schools can continue to use boot racks and coat hooks as long as staff are able to supervise student traffic flow in these areas. Students should not gather in these high-traffic areas. Schools will follow the cleaning recommendations to support the use of boot racks.

### Student supplies and learning materials

Students will use and store their own personal supplies. Teachers will plan learning activities to reduce or minimize the need to share equipment, textbooks or materials. If items are shared, they must be cleaned and disinfected after use. Students will wash or sanitize their hands both before and after using shared items.

### Washroom protocols

Washrooms will be cleaned and disinfected several times throughout the day. Depending on the size of the school and the location of washrooms, schools may assign students to specific washrooms.

### Water fountains

Water fountains can continue operating. Students are encouraged to fill their water bottles from the fountain instead of drinking from it directly.

Fountains will be cleaned and disinfected several times throughout the day, with particular attention to the knob and push buttons.

### Common areas

Schools will have measures in place to promote physical distancing in spaces where students often gather, such as foyers, learning commons or T-intersections in hallways. Measures may include:

- limiting the number of students allowed in specific areas at certain times
- requiring students to walk straight through some areas so they don't crowd together in groups
- reminding students to follow physical distancing protocols

Schools will also develop protocols to reduce risk in other spaces such as prayer rooms, staff workrooms and utility spaces.

Masks are required throughout the school for all students and staff.

### School libraries

Schools have the opportunity to reopen libraries to students this year.

Elementary schools will schedule cohorts to use the library at specific times. Spaces will be cleaned and disinfected between each cohort of students.

Junior high and high school libraries will be open for students, and schools will put in place a cleaning protocol between groups who use the library.

If schools are unable to open their libraries, they will put a process in place to ensure teachers can access materials from the library to support learning.

### Recess and playground equipment

Students in Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 6 will remain in their assigned learning cohort for recess activities. Elementary schools will ensure each cohort has an area outside that supports physical distancing and promotes play and physical activity. Like last year, schools may stagger break times or assign student cohorts to specific areas of the schoolyard.

Before and after school, staff will be assigned to supervise areas outside school entrances.

Schools will not assign staff to supervise playground equipment before and after school.

### Open- or closed-campus school communities

Junior high and high schools will work with their school community to decide if students will be allowed to leave campus during lunch breaks or spare periods. If students are permitted to leave the school building, they must:

- exit through their assigned door, if appropriate
- respect physical distancing and all other provincial COVID-19 health protocols when off campus
- assess whether they have any symptoms of illness before they re-enter the school—students with newly developed symptoms will need to go home or remain in the school's sickroom
- re-enter the school through their assigned door, if appropriate

Schools will also need to identify a space or spaces in the school where students may be accommodated.

### Lunch

It is important for students who stay at school for lunch to remember to bring their lunch each day—at this time, our Division is not able to accommodate family members who want to come into the school to drop off lunches. If a student forgets their lunch, families should phone the school to work out a solution.

Students will store lunches with their other personal belongings.

All students must wash/disinfect their hands before eating and eat only their own food. At this time, **microwaves will not be available to students** and vending machines will not be operating.

Elementary students will remain in their cohort to eat lunch. Multiple cohorts will not gather together to eat. Schools are able to hire lunchroom supervisors to help supervise students. These staff must follow all COVID-19 health protocols and will not be able to enter the school if they are sick.

Junior high and high school students who stay on campus may be assigned to an area of the school for lunch.

If the school is using a common lunch area, they will develop a plan to clean and disinfect after students use the space.

School cafeterias and canteens must follow the Alberta government's [COVID-19 health guidelines](#).

**Schools will not be able to support any food being brought into the school through a food delivery service (such as pizza or Skip the Dishes).**

**The Division will reassess this for the second half of the school year.**

### Food in schools

Potluck events, barbecues or special lunch days (e.g., hot dog day) are all postponed at this time. Treats cannot be sent from home for birthdays or other special days.

The Division will re-evaluate this for the second half of the school year.

### School nutrition programs

Schools that offer school nutrition programs will continue to follow the processes put in place for the 2020–21 school year.

### Volunteers and visitors

The Division looks forward to having visitors and volunteers back in schools working with our students. However, as we initially come back into school under tighter health guidelines, schools are encouraged to continue with virtual experiences as much as possible.

Schools will explore ways to safely bring volunteers, visitors and parents back into their buildings this year. Schools are encouraged to work with their communities on timelines and processes that will work for them. This will look different from school to school based on the unique circumstances of each school community.

When visitors are invited back into schools, all individuals are required to:

- [screen for illness](#)
- sign in at the school's visitor log
- wear a mask

The Division will monitor the impact of visitors in schools on an ongoing basis and may make additional changes throughout the school year.

Individuals who are permitted to enter schools without an appointment include Canada Post, delivery and maintenance personnel who support the running of the school, and emergency responders.

**All visitors are required to wear a mask when entering a Division school.**

### Edmonton Public Schools staff entering school buildings

At this time, Division staff are permitted to enter school buildings as required. This includes supply staff, facilities maintenance personnel, delivery employees, teaching and learning support staff and Division security staff. All staff visiting the school must sign the school's visitor log.

**Division staff are required to wear a mask in schools.** If staff are working directly with students or school staff they must remain masked. If Division staff are working alone, they may remove their mask.

### Family and school communication

Families are encouraged to stay in contact with their schools through email and over the phone. Families who need to go into the school must book an appointment in advance.

Family members attending the school for any reason, including to pick up a sick child, will be asked to complete the school's visitor log and complete the [Alberta Health daily checklist](#).

Family members are required to wear a mask in schools.

### Student teachers

The Division will continue to support the placement of student teachers. Student teachers will be expected to follow all safety and health protocols in place for Division staff and students. They will not be permitted to attend the school if they have symptoms of illness.

### Community use of schools and joint use agreements

The Division will work with joint use partners on an ongoing basis to work toward safely reopening school spaces for community use.

### Tenants

Staff from the Division's property management area will work with all tenants to ensure they follow both provincial and Division health and safety expectations and protocols.

### Transportation

#### Yellow bus service

To help keep students and drivers as safe as possible:

- all students riding the bus are required to wear a mask, as directed by the Government of Alberta
- students will be assigned regular seats, using a seating plan
- students will respect physical distancing while they get on and off the bus
- there will be a protective zone between the driver and student passengers
- the bus will be cleaned according to COVID-19 cleaning standards prior to each run, and this cleaning will be recorded by the driver

#### Public transit

Masks are required for students who take Edmonton Transit Service (ETS).

#### Carpooling

When possible, students and staff should only carpool with members of the same household. If you or your child must carpool with another family, please follow these safety guidelines:

- limit the number of people in the vehicle, where possible, to maintain physical distance of two metres
- make sure all occupants wear masks and wash their hands before entering the vehicle
- clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces such as door handles, seatbelt buckles and arm rests after each trip

### Emergency procedures

We will continue to work with City of Edmonton Fire and Rescue to ensure that emergency drills (such as fire drills or lockdowns) reflect COVID-19 safe protocols.

# Teaching and learning

## Family choice in the first half of the year

Many families want a choice in how their child learns because of the changing nature of the pandemic. We understand this and want to make sure all students and families feel comfortable learning in person or online.

Families have until **August 19 at 4 p.m.** to decide whether their child will attend school in person or online for the first half of the school year.

There are several areas in our plan where we have indicated that we will continue to monitor and may make changes over the coming weeks in response to evolving health data, provincial guidelines and how the plan is working.

It is important that families choose a learning option that they are comfortable with if some safety restrictions loosen up or are lifted prior to the end of the first semester. Families will not be able to switch their choice after the deadline.

Read [more about back to school](#) on epsb.ca.

## Full return to in-person learning

We hope all students can return to in-person learning for the second half of the 2021–22 school year.

If that's not possible due to the pandemic, families will have another opportunity to choose online or in-person learning for the remainder of the year.

We will share more information with families in December.

### 2021–22 School Year Semesters

- **First half:** September 2 to January 28, 2022
- **Second half:** January 31 to June 28, 2022

Families remain enrolled in the school where they registered or pre-enrolled for 2021–22, whether they choose in-person or online learning.

## In-person instruction

Students who attend school in person will be assigned to a class where a classroom teacher will support their learning. If the student is registered in an alternative or language program, they will continue to receive instruction in that program.

If a student needs to stay home due to illness, their teacher will support them by sharing what they've missed but will not provide online instruction.

## Online instruction

Students who learn online will be part of an online learning group with an assigned teacher.

Online students will remain enrolled at the school where they registered for 2021–22. However, their online teacher may not be a staff member at that school. As well, students in an online learning group will often be from more than one Division school.

**Based on the number of students who select online instruction, the Division cannot guarantee that alternative and language programs will be available online.**

Families with children registered in an alternative program, but choosing online learning for the first half of the school year, will continue to receive information from their school about the alternative program. Online students will also be welcome to participate in any special events related to the alternative program.

## High-quality resources for all students

Over the last year, the Division has invested significant resources to develop comprehensive learning materials for students. These materials provide continuity of instruction and help teachers provide high-quality learning opportunities, no matter what type of learning they choose for their child.



### Students enrolled at Argyll Centre

[Argyll Centre](#) has been delivering home education and online learning services to Edmonton families for more than 20 years. Home education through Argyll Centre is different from the online learning option families have in the first half of the school year. According to Alberta's [Education Act](#), a home education program is provided by a parent under the supervision of a board of trustees of a school division or an accredited private school. The parent must make sure their home education program meets the requirements in the [Home Education Regulation](#). Once registered at Argyll Centre, a student is no longer connected to their designated home school for the 2021–22 school year.

### School fees

Families can expect to pay school fees at the start of the school year and again in February, when the second half of the year begins. Fees will be based on whether a student is learning in person or online.

Lunchroom supervision fees will also be calculated twice a year. Families may continue to pay these fees on a monthly basis.

Because schools will organize their budgets to best support family choice in their community, schools are not able to refund fees once they have been received in each half of the school year.

Bus pass fees will continue to be paid and calculated monthly. Review [student transportation fees for 2021–22](#).

### A closer look at in-person instruction

#### Pre-K and Kindergarten programming

For half-day Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten programming, classrooms will be cleaned and disinfected between morning and afternoon classes.

Each cohort of students will have their own set of toys, manipulatives and resources to support learning. These materials will also be cleaned and disinfected daily.

#### Elementary

Students in Grades 1–6 will be organized into learning groups. Each learning group will be considered to be a cohort. Students will remain in their cohort for all instruction and for non-instructional times such as lunch and recess.

Other adults who enter the classroom to interact with a cohort of students (e.g., school administrators, the music teacher, a lunch supervisor) will follow Division safety protocols.

#### Junior high

Junior high schools will consider a variety of factors to decide how to best organize their students into cohort groups and provide programming with minimal disruption to these groups.

#### High school

High schools will schedule using a semester system. Learning for students will be organized into the first and second halves of the school year.

### Supporting students with special needs

Returning to school can cause additional concern or anxiety for families of students with special needs. Families need to know we are taking steps to support students with special needs by:

- continuing COVID-19 safety protocols for complex medical interventions and supports that students require, to keep both students and staff as safe as possible
- continuing student-support plans, such as Individual Program Plans (IPPs), Medication Management Plans or Individual Behaviour Support Plans
- addressing effective learning strategies for online learning in IPPs

### International students

International students will be permitted and will adhere to all federal and international travel requirements, prior to attending an Edmonton Public School.

All international students need to follow isolation requirements and relevant public health orders.

### Use of technology

School devices will be disinfected between uses, according to Division COVID-19 cleaning guidelines.

Students may be encouraged to bring their own devices to school. In most cases, we recommend Chromebooks because they work with the Google Workspace tools we use across our Division. Families interested in buying a Chromebook for their child may access special pricing from our Division suppliers through the [Chromebook parent purchase program](#). Students who bring their own device are responsible for taking it home to charge it every night.

Families who choose to have their child participate in online instruction require access to a device and a reliable internet connection at home. Families without this access should contact their school to borrow a device and arrange internet access, if needed.

# Subject-specific information

## Music

Music instruction and extracurricular activities will continue with some health measures in place.

Singing, wind instruments and band classes will be permitted when:

- elementary students remain in their assigned cohort and do not combine cohorts
- students singing indoors are wearing masks
- students do not share instruments or sheet music

The music room must be cleaned and disinfected between each cohort of students.

Schools will determine appropriate processes to support health and safety based on their own spaces and circumstances.

## Physical Education

Schools will continue to provide physical education instruction. If the weather permits, we encourage schools to hold physical education classes outdoors.

### Equipment and locker use

Sharing equipment is discouraged. Equipment must be cleaned and disinfected before and after each use. Students must wash or sanitize their hands before and after using equipment.

Schools will have the ability to make change room lockers available, but the lockers must be cleaned and emptied between cohorts.

## Art

Students will have their own personal materials.

If different cohorts use the art classroom, it must be cleaned and disinfected between each cohort.

## Labs

Schools will determine how best to deliver lab-based learning following Division safety protocols

## Work experience

Work experience will continue. Schools that offer work experience will work with the Division Occupational Health and Safety team to make sure all placements have appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols in place.

## Curriculum resources to support continuity of learning

Similar to how we approached learning last year, we are coordinating in-person and online teaching to make sure students across the Division learn outcomes from the curriculum at the same time during the school year. This means students who shift from online to in-person learning at the end of January 2022 can do so without disrupting the continuity of their learning.

There are literacy and numeracy resources available for families on the Division's [Resource Hub](#) and the EPSB Together app.

## Alternative programs

Edmonton Public Schools respects the choice of families—with this in mind, it is important to recognize the following:

- Students registered in a Division alternative program who opt to learn **in-person** will continue to receive instruction related to the alternative program.
- Students registered in a Division alternative program who opt to learn **online** will receive instruction that covers all required areas of the provincial curriculum.

**The Division cannot guarantee that alternative and language programs will be available online.**

### Assessment

Students taking online and in-person learning will continue to take Division-level assessments throughout the year. Teachers will monitor their progress and share updates about their growth at key times.

#### • Kindergarten

- November 2021: instead of a November interim report, parents will have the opportunity to participate in a parent-teacher conference
- January 2022: a mid-year progress report indicating achievement across all subject areas
- April 2022: an interim progress report summarizing continued growth and progress
- June 2022: a final progress report indicating year end achievement for all subjects

#### • Grades 1–9:

- November 2021: an interim report summarizing growth and progress
- January 2022: a mid-year progress report indicating achievement across all subject areas
- April 2022: an interim progress report summarizing continued growth and progress
- June 2022: a final progress report indicating year end achievement for all subjects

#### • Grades 10–12:

- January and June 2022: students will receive an interim report summarizing achievement midway through the semester and a final course grade at the end of the semester

### Parent-teacher conferences

At this time, all parent-teacher conferences will be hosted online.

### Provincial exams

Exam	Provincial direction
<b>Grades 6 and 9 Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs)</b>	Will resume for the 2021–22 school year
<b>Grade 12 Diploma Exams</b>	Will resume for the 2021–22 school year

# School-based activities

## Field trips

As we start the school year, schools are encouraged to have students participate in virtual field trips.

This year, schools will reintroduce day trips. When considering field trips, schools will work through all safety protocols with the host venue. When planning trips:

- students should be grouped in cohorts throughout the trip and will be required to wear mask
- elementary students must remain in their regular school cohort group for any field trips, including on the bus and at the field trip location
- schools will send home permission forms prior to a field trip that outline all COVID-19 protocols

As always, parents can choose whether their child participates in school field trips.

The Division will monitor field trips to support and work toward the opportunity for overnight field trips.

National field trips are suspended at this time. However, we will continue to review the feasibility of these field trips.

International field trips are suspended for the 2021–22 school year because of the uncertainty and potential risks associated with travel during COVID-19.

## Assemblies and special events

In elementary schools, because cohorts are an important safety strategy, school-wide events such as assemblies and performances will continue to be virtual rather than in-person.

Junior high and high schools have the flexibility to begin examining the reintroduction of school events. Schools will assess each event based on Division guidelines and let families know which events will take place.

After a successful virtual event last year, this year's READ IN Week will again be limited to school staff reading with students and virtual guest readers.

## Extracurricular activities

Schools will decide whether they can offer extracurricular activities that follow Division guidelines and let families know which activities are available. Students will be able to participate in activities regardless of whether they choose in-person or online learning.

## Graduations

The Division is hopeful that traditional graduation ceremonies will return in 2022. We are encouraging schools to book venues and plan for in-person celebrations with contingency plans in place if tight restrictions are put in place due to a surge in COVID-19 cases.

## School council meetings

School council meetings for the 2021–22 school year will continue to go ahead.

Schools will work with their school councils to determine whether to hold in-person or online meetings. In-person meetings will follow safety protocols.

# Supporting mental health and well-being

*The pandemic has caused a lot of uncertainty for families and our communities.*

Schools play an important role in promoting healthy development and recognizing early signs of mental-health challenges.

Our Division is taking a number of steps to support student mental health and well-being. Review our [Division's approach to mental health](#) to learn about supports available to students.

Parents or guardians who are concerned for their child's well-being should reach out to their child's school or may wish to access community resources.

- [Mental Health Helpline](#): 1-877-303-2642
  - This toll-free helpline provides confidential and anonymous services, crisis intervention, information about mental-health services and referrals to other agencies.
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868, text CONNECT to 686868 or visit [kidshelpphone.ca](#), [jeunessejecoute.ca](#)
- Health Link: 811
- Alberta Health Services:
  - [Help in Tough Times](#) offers mental health resources.
  - [Healthy Together](#) offers tips for staying healthy, active and safe.
- [Crisis Text Line](#) Alberta (available 24/7): text CONNECT to 741741
- [Crisis Services Canada Suicide Prevention Service](#): 1-833-456-4566
- [Child Advocacy Centres of Alberta](#):
  - Offers resources to help recognize signs of child abuse and support victims of abuse.
- Alberta 211: Call or text INFO to 211, or visit [ab.211.ca](#)
  - Get referrals and resources about addictions and mental health supports, and connect with trained specialists.
- [Indigenous Wellness Core](#):
  - The program partners with Indigenous peoples, communities and key stakeholders to provide accessible, culturally appropriate health services for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Alberta.
- [Jordan's Principle](#):
  - Supports First Nations children's access to mental health and other supports and services.
- First Nations and Inuit [Hope for Wellness Help Line](#): 1-855-242-3310
  - This federal resource is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Access the online chat at [Hope for Wellness](#).

Find [more mental health supports for students and staff](#) in the Government of Alberta's 2021–2022 School Year Plan.



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