



August 31, 2021

Dear Parents, Guardians and SD54 Employees,

I hope you are enjoying the last few days of a restful, and safe summer. The entire district is looking forward to welcoming students back to school this fall. As we prepare for the beginning of the 2021/22 school year, I am writing to let you know about an important change to this year's district school calendar and to update you on the Provincial health and safety measures that will be in place across all our schools and facilities.

The Government of Canada recently passed legislation to make September 30 a federal statutory holiday called the *National Day for Truth and Reconciliation*. This day is an important step in the reconciliation process. It provides an opportunity to recognize and commemorate the tragic history and ongoing legacy of residential schools, and to honour their survivors, their families and communities. Our school district calendar has been adjusted to include this important day of remembrance, when schools will be closed.

September 7th will be a planning day for staff at schools including training/orientation for staff on the updated COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 School Settings. This dedicated time in the morning will also provide staff time to plan and prepare for student attendance in alignment with the updated guidelines.

Opening day for students is September 8, 2021. Parents/guardians will be receiving more detailed school schedules and plans for students in the coming days.

Updated COVID-19 guidelines for K-12 schools were finalized last week, and are detailed in the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) document.

Most measures from last school year will remain in effect, with **a few key changes**.

- Cohorts, also known as learning groups, are no longer recommended by public health as a COVID-19 mitigation measure and will not be used.
- All K-12 staff, visitors, and students in grades 4 to 12 will be required to wear non-medical masks in all indoor areas of the school and on school buses. Students in kindergarten to Grade 3 are encouraged to wear masks. Exceptions to the mask requirements are outlined on [page 20 of the provincial guidelines](#).
- Targeted measures: Local public health orders may be put in place for entire regions or communities, including schools, as determined by the Medical Health Officer.
- Extra curricular sports and activities resume and gatherings and events can occur if PHO guidelines are followed

- According to public health, **vaccines** are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in schools and communities. Public health strongly encourages all eligible students (12+) and staff to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

There are several **health and safety measures that will remain the same** at the start of this school year:

- **Daily health checks** are required before students/staff come to school;
- **Diligent hand hygiene** will continue to be emphasized, with hand-washing encouraged throughout the day;
- Although public health no longer recommends strict physical distancing of two metres, schools will use strategies to help with respecting personal space and making use of outdoor space as appropriate;
- **Enhanced cleaning** and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces, will occur at least once in a 24-hour period;
- **Ventilation systems** in all school district facilities meet WorkSafeBC requirements and as set out in the provincial guidelines;
- We will be continuing to carefully **manage and document visitors** in our schools in alignment with current provincial guidelines. All prospective visitors will need to complete a daily health check and sign in with their contact information.

We appreciate your support and patience as we once again make health and safety a top priority in our school district. I look forward to welcoming students and staff back to the classroom for another exciting school year.

Take care and stay well,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. McDiarmid". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end.

Mike McDiarmid
Superintendent of Schools
School District #54 (Bulkley Valley)