

Hello Local Presidents,

The Ministry released a framework document entitled Supporting The K–12 Education Response to COVID-19 on March 27, 2020. The BCTF had input into the development of the document. It contains information about the decisions that have been made thus far for K–12 education in BC in the context of a provincial state of emergency. This document provides a framework for districts using the guiding principles that the province has developed. Local Presidents are using this document to work collaboratively with districts, so decisions are made to ensure the safety of everyone, using the best health information available under the direction of the Ministry of Health and Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry.

### **Co-ordinated advocacy at all levels**

K–12 Education Partners are working together to figure out how we can contribute to continuity of learning opportunities, while keeping everyone healthy and safe. Representatives of teachers, support workers, principals and vice-principals, superintendents, trustees, and the Ministry of Education are in constant communication. I am in close contact with the Ministry of Education, the BC Public Schools Employers' Association, and the BC Schools Superintendents Association and discuss emerging issues with them several times a day.

The BCTF also has representatives who sit on Ministry of Education committees in order to inform Continuity of Learning Opportunities. BCTF participation has helped to shape the Integrated Planning Framework issued by the Ministry to districts. While we do not agree with everything in the Framework, overall the direction the Province has taken is conducive to ensuring health and safety.

### **Locals are key stakeholders for consultation**

The Ministry of Education has emphasized to school boards that our locals are key stakeholders and must be consulted with early and often and has directed districts to ensure that BCTF locals are included in district stakeholder advisory teams. The BCTF is supporting locals by providing ongoing, intensive support from BCTF Field Service Admin Staff, the Executive Committee, and holding frequent conference calls with locals to keep them updated on emerging information. I know many Local Presidents have worked long hours throughout Spring Break in order to ensure that the BCTF has the information it needs to carry out this advocacy and to ensure that districts are attending to health and safety.

The Ministry has also directed boards to work with medical health officers to ensure that schools are safe.

### **Guiding Principle 1: Health and safety is everyone's number one priority**

We have emphasized to government that we need to go slow because we mustn't accidentally undermine the critical public health measures that necessitated suspension of in-class instruction. We have also highlighted that the employer has a responsibility to ensure that the workplace is safe and healthy. We all have a responsibility to socially distance ourselves from others, including our coworkers.

The government has a set of guiding principles to inform K–12 during this time, and their number one priority is to “ensure a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.”

This means:

- not all teachers need to immediately report to the worksite. If you have a health condition which makes you vulnerable (including pregnancy) or are caring for someone in a vulnerable category, if you are self-isolating, if you have young children and no childcare, or if there are other circumstances which interfere with your ability to report to the worksite.
- some locations will have staggered work schedules and limited building access.
- some workspace arrangements (e.g., shared prep office) will need to be changed in order to ensure social distancing.
- If you are ill, please do not come to work.

The BC Centre for Disease Control and Ministry of Health have issued advice to districts on the operation of schools. The Provincial Health Officer has provided a great deal of public education on what social distancing means. If teachers are concerned that their work arrangement does not meet the requirements of social distancing, please encourage them to contact their Staff Rep and/or the local office.

### **Guiding Principle 2: Providing the services needed to support children of our essential workers**

During this unusual time, some teachers will be providing care to children of essential workers. This is for children ages 5–12. In some cases, care for children 0–5 will continue in schools, however, teachers will not be responsible for those children.

In the immediate future this means that some children of hospital workers in regions which have a high concentration of cases will be attending school sites. In some places this is already happening, and districts have been working with health authorities in order to ensure health and safety.

Over the next few weeks additional children will be provided with care. We are urging districts to do this slowly and carefully in collaboration with the Local President. It is possible to fulfil this need in a way that does not jeopardize health and safety or increase the spread of COVID. In some places, CUPE workers and outside childcare providers will be providing this service. In other places, volunteer teachers and TTOCs are doing this work as well. Districts have been encouraged to plan around hospital shifts, which means that the hours of care will be broader than instructional hours, generally 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Before and after school care may be provided by outside childcare providers, in order to provide care from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., five days a week. This is an important service schools are serving to ensure hospitals in the province are well staffed and able to support those who are the sickest due to COVID-19.

### **Guiding Principle 3: Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance**

As teachers, we know that schools provide a broad range of support to students, such as providing meals and health services such as occupational services. Work is underway to ensure that these services continue in a way that ensures the health and safety of all. As time goes on, districts are looking at ways to ensure that non-enrolling teachers can continue to provide additional services to vulnerable students.

The Ministry has directed districts with meal programs to work with health authorities in order to ensure health and safety.

During this time, students need to know that they are valued and that they are still part of a school community. Students' sense of well-being may continue to shift as the pandemic evolves. Schools and school districts should keep in mind that students who were not considered vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 outbreak may now be experiencing mental health challenges.

Specialist teachers, educational assistants, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and others who support vulnerable students will continue to have a role to play in students' lives.

### **Guiding Principle 4: Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students**

The initial phase of continuity of educational opportunities is a need assessment. Teachers will work with principals in order to determine how to do this. In many places it will likely involve teachers phoning families in order to begin a conversation around what resources the family has available, you have likely already begun this work. Teachers will use their professional skillsets in order to compassionately assess the ability of students and families to support learning. During normal times teachers provide students with social and emotional support, and during this time social and emotional support will make an incredible difference in the lives of students. Schools may be closed, but teachers' hearts are open.

### **Technology**

The Ministry has communicated to districts that teachers will use their professional judgement in determining how to communicate with students. Everyone understands that it is unrealistic to expect that teachers will simply switch to online delivery.

The Ministry has stated that some teachers will connect with their students in a primarily online environment. Others will use strategies that utilize more traditional resources. Educators everywhere will need to be sensitive to the fact that not all students have regular (or any) access to technology, so allowances should be made for "low tech" ways for students to engage in learning experiences.

We caution members against using personal devices for work and against rapidly adopting new platforms without adequate training and administrative support.

## **Distributed Learning**

There has been a surge in applications of new DL enrollments, however, the Ministry has halted DL enrollment. Given that students no longer have access to school-based resources, and that K–12 education overall has shifted to educational opportunities, DL courses may need to be modified accordingly.

## **Reporting**

The Ministry has indicated that teachers across the province are empowered to determine a final grade for children based on work completed to-date and the assessment of participation in learning opportunities that will occur over the coming months. Teachers are expected to prepare report cards for their students for June.

The evaluation of learning taking place after the suspension of in-class instruction should be in relation to a smaller selection of learning standards which students are able to complete at home.

British Columbia's Student Reporting Policy allows significant flexibility for schools and school districts regarding the content and format of report cards.

## **Graduation**

The Minister has made it clear that all students who are on track to graduate will graduate. Conversations are ongoing regarding students who may have been struggling to meet graduation requirements. The priority will be on the 80 credits and courses needed for graduation. The Ministry is not mandating or specifying the minimum number of hours that must be completed for a student to receive credit for a Grade 10, 11, or 12 course. Hours do not necessarily reflect the actual learning that occurs. The focus is on determining if, and how, sufficient learning has taken place during these exceptional circumstances. Sufficient learning will be determined by teachers using their professional judgement.

The Ministry is working with the BC post-secondary system to facilitate successful transitions, including issuing transcripts.

## **Career life connections**

For the specific requirement of 30 hours of work experience or career-life experience, students can be given many opportunities to fulfil these requirements in alternative ways. For example, students could do work around their home such as babysitting younger siblings, household cleaning, yard maintenance, food preparation, maintenance work or household accounting.

## **Provincial assessments**

Provincial assessments will not take place this year with one exception. Most students who are on track to graduate have already taken the Numeracy 10 assessment, but a fraction of this group have not. Arrangements will be made to ensure that these students are able to complete

the Numeracy 10 assessment, and since it is a small group it is feasible to ensure that it can be done in a safe way.

**Parent communication**

In terms of timelines, the Ministry has indicated that continuity of educational opportunities will begin in mid-April. We have emphasized from the beginning that there is no rush and proper planning must occur first. Some parents are anxious that their children will fall behind. In the context of a global pandemic, education as we know it has ground to a halt around the world, and everyone is having to adjust to new ways of doing things. Administrators need to take the lead in communicating with parents in order to give teachers time and space to plan.

Terry Mooring  
President  
BCTF