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“Preparing Today’s Learner for Tomorrow”

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ISD PREPARES FOR NEW SCHOOL YEAR

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One thing is for certain...back to school will look different this year!

Our long-awaited return to school involves planning that is much different than last September. We strive to have students return to as much in-class learning with their teachers as possible, while keeping all involved safe. Our focus is the health and safety of our students, our staff and our school communities. Planning thus far has included the release of a divisional plan based on provincial guidelines provided by Manitoba Education and Public Health at the end of July. With the Interlake School Division plan as a guide, schools are now working on school-specific plans which will be available on August 31st. As our 23 learning spaces are each unique, school-specific plans will also be unique, each addressing the specific needs of their learning community. Of course, within school-specific plans there will also be some fundamental elements that we can all help with.

The first fundamental element? Staying home when we are not feeling well. This will be true for students and staff. All adults will be required to screen for symptoms prior to entering our buildings. Families will be expected to ensure that students stay home when they are sick or are exhibiting any symptoms of a cold, flu, or COVID-19. If students exhibit symptoms during the school day they will be removed from their class, provided with a medical mask, and parents/caregivers will be contacted and asked to pick up students immediately. Parents/caregivers are asked to keep up-to-date contact information on file with their school(s). Families will need to have a plan in place to pick up students should they receive a call from their school.

Some other fundamentals...hand hygiene, sneeze etiquette, and appropriate physical contact. We will ask families to ensure that all students exercise proper hand hygiene before boarding the school bus and/or before arriving at school. Hand sanitizer will be utilized at all school entrances and will be available throughout schools. Extra emphasis will be placed on hand hygiene several times during the school day. Schools will also be teaching and emphasizing proper sneeze etiquette and appropriate physical contact.

We will keep our distance, as we are able. This will begin as students board the school bus and as students are dropped off at school and will continue right through until dismissals at the end of the day. It will be important to have students arrive at school in a staggered fashion so as to avoid crowding at entrances. This may mean that schools ask for families' help in adhering to specific times for dropping off and picking up students who do not ride the school bus. Students will enter schools through designated entrances. These may not always be the most convenient entrances but schools will be insisting that specific groups of students (cohorts) consistently utilize the same entrances. All schools will be operating with cohorts. With a provincial guideline of 75 students per cohort, some ISD schools will have one cohort (the entire school) and will all be able to be outside on the playground together with appropriate distancing in place, while other larger schools will have multiple cohorts. Depending on the size of the school, cohorts may encompass a singular grade (all Grade 1 students), a band of grades (all Grade 1-4 students), or a portion of a grade (half of the Grade 9 students). Specific information regarding cohorts will be provided by schools when their plans are made available on August 31st.

As another layer of protection, students in Grade 4 and up will wear non-medical masks on school buses and in schools. All staff will wear non-medical masks where physical distancing is not possible. Families are asked to send their students with masks. Schools and buses will have extra masks on hand should students arrive without a mask.

ISD staff will be prepared to provide support to our students who may have struggled during the time away from school or who may be struggling with the return to school. Several supports are available within our schools (Classroom Teachers, Resource and Guidance Staff, School Administrators) and more broadly across the division (School Social Workers, Well-Being Support Worker, School Psychologists, etc.). Families are encouraged to contact their child's school to access supports as needed.

In the event of a case of COVID-19 in our schools, Public Health will lead the response. While schools will be asked to provide contact information, Public Health will be responsible for contact tracing, communication with close contacts, and decisions regarding self-isolation and the safe return to school.

We offer the following as some highlights found within the ISD reopening plan:

- Junior Kindergarten for our youngest learners (children born in 2016) – programming will be paused until further notice.
- Kindergarten – alternate days of full, in-class instruction with the exception of Brant-Argyle students who will return to five days of full, in-class instruction per week. Parents will be notified of Kindergarten start dates.
- Grades 1-8 – five days of full, in-class instruction per week starting September 8th.
- Grades 9-12 – alternate days of full, in-class instruction starting September 8th and 9th. Half of our students will attend on days 1,3, and 5. Half of our students will attend on days 2,4, and 6. While at home on alternate days, students will be expected to engage in learning activities prescribed and supported by their teachers. School timetables will be designed such that each

high school is prepared to have students return for up to five days of full, in-class instruction per week as public health protocols and school resources permit.

- All students with special needs – five days of full, in-class instruction per week starting September 8th.
- Learning at home will only be provided to those students who have been medically advised not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-related risk factors.
- Some specialty programming and elective offerings have been impacted:
 - Singing in K-8 Music classes will be suspended until further notice.
 - Choral, Band, and Foods classes will be suspended until further notice.
 - Physical Education classes will continue with necessary modifications for physical distancing and will occur outside when possible.
 - Inter-school offerings (students attending another school for one or more courses) will be suspended until further notice.
 - Elective courses will be offered by cohort model only and as resources permit at each school.
 - Course offerings will be re-assessed throughout the school year as public health permits.
 - Each school will assess their local ability to offer extracurricular activities.
- School entry and exit, timing of breaks and lunch hours, and class change schedules will be staggered to limit interaction between cohorts of students.
- Canteen services have been suspended until further notice.
- Locker use may be limited or discontinued.
- All continuing education programming is suspended until further notice.
- Community use of schools will be suspended until further notice, with the exception of child care centres operating in schools.
- School buses will be running for those students who are eligible for school bus transportation. Bus drivers and students in Grade 4 and up will be required to wear non-medical masks.
- Although we have entertained transportation for non-eligible students in the past, transportation for non-eligible students will not be available in September. Availability of transportation for non-eligible students will be revisited throughout the school year.
- School ventilation systems will be programmed to maximize fresh air intake.
- All visitors (including parents/caregivers) must adhere to self-screening, physical distancing, and recommended hygiene practices.

Although some new funding was announced by the Province in late August, Manitoba school divisions have been asked to first utilize funds that were not expended in the 2019-2020 school year to address needs associated with the reopening of schools. In order to operationalize our divisional reopening plan, we have deployed additional funds in the following areas:

- human resources...
 - additional time for bus drivers to clean and sanitize buses twice daily;
 - additional bus routes to allow us to meet seating guidelines on all routes;
 - additional custodial time to meet heightened cleaning guidelines;

- additional educational assistant time to support classroom learning; and
- the hiring of full-time supply teachers to address teacher absences.
- equipment/supplies...
 - additional cleaning and sanitation supplies;
 - availability of hand washing supplies including portable hand washing stations;
 - availability of hand sanitizer at all entrances and throughout schools;
 - temporary storage units for storage of classroom equipment which cannot be easily sanitized (e.g. sand tables, carpets, soft seating);
 - cleaning equipment to allow for more efficient cleaning of spaces and buses; and
 - appropriate signage for traffic flow.

Our planning points to doing all that we can to keep our students and staff safe. The message from Public Health is that COVID-19 will unfortunately find its way into Manitoba schools just as it has found its way into our communities. While we cannot zero out that risk, we will follow all public health guidelines and advice so that we can mitigate the risk in our spaces and provide clear information to public health in order to isolate transmission. We will be prepared to adjust our plans on short notice throughout the school year in response to changing public health protocols and guidelines.

We acknowledge that families may be apprehensive regarding the return to school and will be seeking as much information as possible. We encourage families to watch for communication from schools on August 31st regarding school-specific plans.

We acknowledge and greatly appreciate all that our ISD staff are doing to prepare for a September like no other. This preparation will include training and orientation for all ISD staff prior to the return of students on September 8th.

We all have a role to play in the safe reopening of our schools. If you would like to help out by placing your name on our spare custodian, support staff, and/or teacher lists, we would be more than happy to have the help. Enquiries can be made by phoning the Board Office at 204-467-5100.

The ISD team looks forward to welcoming our students back in September and to working collaboratively with our communities. The complete ISD plan for welcoming our students back to school can be accessed on the ISD website (www.interlakesd.ca).

As always, we will be better together!

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