



## The Board of Education of School District No. 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)

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January 3, 2022

Dear Parents/Guardians/Caregivers:

### **RE: Updates Concerning the Phased In Return to School**

With our calendars changing to January, it is common for many of us to reflect on the past year. Reflection is often about questioning, in a positive way, what you do and why you do it and then deciding whether there is a better or more effective way of doing it in the future.

As I've reflected on the first four months of the 2021-22 school year, I feel confident that as a district we have kept the best interests of students at the core of our work by ensuring continuity of learning to the best of our ability. SD 83 has however, seen a handful of school closures that have interrupted learning for students within several communities. These closures have been a result of school outbreaks and/or functional closures related to COVID-19.

What many people within the public will not know or fully understand is the immense stress and anxiety that many of our teaching staff, support staff, principals and vice-principals continue to feel. These employees have in many instances sacrificed the safety of themselves and family members to ensure that students within the district have enjoyed the privilege of learning in a face-to-face environment. There is no way that I can articulate my appreciation and admiration for the love, care and concern they have provided to students.

What we know about the Omicron variant is that it is highly transmissible and has a much lower incubation period. *When I reflect about "whether there is a better or more effective way" of keeping our schools open for in person instruction, I continue to come back to reducing the chances of transmission within our schools.* One of the easiest ways of accomplishing this is resorting to what we learned as kids, that being proper hand hygiene. As parents we teach our kids to respect others by covering their nose or mouth when they were coughing or sneezing. It seems simple but we all know how those sneezes and coughs can slip out before we know it.

Non-medical grade (3ply), Surgical/procedural and medical grade masks have proven to be effective in reducing the transmission of viruses. Knowing that Omicron is highly contagious, my reflection also leads me to consider how masking has been approached and if there is a more effective way of doing it in the future.

Beginning January 4<sup>th</sup>, our district will be working to procure a limited supply of N95 masks for staff. In addition to this, we will be sending 3 ply masks to schools for both staff and students to use in place of their cloth masks. Currently, we are not recommending the use of fabric/cloth masks or gaiters. We

would encourage families that are able, to purchase a box of 3 or 4 ply masks for their children so that together we can reduce the transmissibility of the Omicron variant.

A very small number of masking exemptions apply according to the last [Public Health Order dated December 3, 2021](#) relative to face coverings. These exemptions include: behavioral or health conditions, and physical, cognitive, and mental impairment. Children or staff who fall into one of these categories can complete a district exemption form and discuss this with the principal of their child's school. As part of the exemption process, there will be a requirement to discuss reasonable accommodations that can be made when a child is unable to wear a mask. These accommodations are student specific and will be determined based on the reason for the exemption. Strategies will be reinforced to ensure the safety of all children and staff. In rare circumstances there may not be a possible accommodation due to severe conditions or impairment.

If your child has one of the conditions/impairments listed above, I ask that you access the "SD 83 Mask Exemption Status Form" from your school's website. This form will be available on January 5, 2022. Any parents who have previously declared their children "exempt" will also need to complete the form so that the accommodation strategies can be established for return to school on January 10, 2022. Likewise, staff with medical exemptions will need to contact the Human Resources department to access a form and to discuss reasonable accommodations.

Thank you for your commitment to helping reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 within our school populations. I understand that we are all experiencing "COVID fatigue", however, I am convinced that if we can work together through this next short while, it will allow your children and all others to enjoy what we know is the best delivery of education and that is "in person."

Thank you again for teaching your children the importance of caring for others through our actions and deeds.

Sincerely,

Donna Kriger  
Superintendent