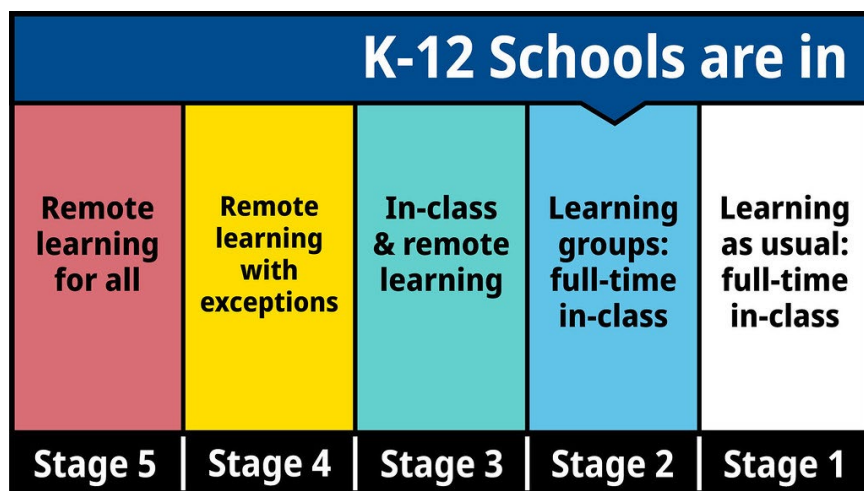




## BC Gov News

# Plan to safely bring K-12 students back to class full time



Enhanced safety measures and additional resources will enable most students in grades K-12 to return to school on Sept. 8, 2020, with full-time in-class learning as the province moves to Stage 2 of B.C.'s Education Restart Plan.

"The classroom is an essential part of a child's social, academic and mental development, and that's why we are working hard to ensure students can safely spend the next school year with their teachers and classmates," said Rob Fleming, Minister of Education. "We were the only jurisdiction in Canada that brought students back into the classroom provincewide before the end of the school year and this has given us valuable information that we are using to develop our plans, ensuring health and safety at schools remain paramount."

On the advice of the provincial health officer, students will be organized into learning groups, a consistent

group of staff and students. This will reduce the number of people each student or staff member will come into contact with, reducing the risk of transmission and ensuring quicker contact tracing by health authorities.

All boards of education and independent school authorities will continue to be required to implement a suite of health and safety measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, following the recently updated guidelines from the BC Centre for Disease Control.

"We know how important it is for children to be back in school – to both support their emotional and mental health and their ability to socialize and to learn," said Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s provincial health officer. "Being back in school is also crucial to support many parents in being able to work, but we must do it safely. We ask for families and workplaces to continue to be flexible as we come into the fall. We've put a lot of thoughtful work and consideration into reopening schools this fall and in making sure we're supporting children in ways that keep them, the people who teach them and our communities safe."

To support and ensure the health and safety of students and staff during this pandemic, a one-time investment of \$45.6 million as part of the BC COVID-19 Action Plan will support school districts and independent schools for the start of the school year. This investment will ensure the increased cleaning of high-contact surfaces, increased number of hand-hygiene stations and the availability of masks upon request, among other safety measures.

Staff and students (or their parents/guardians) must also assess themselves daily for symptoms of COVID-19. If any student or staff member has even mild symptoms, arrangements will be made for that person to return home.

The ministry is developing operational guidelines that will further assist school districts and independent schools with their planning for September. An education steering committee including teachers, parents, Indigenous rightsholders, support staff, principals and vice-principals, school trustees and the public health sector has also been established to identify best practices and find solutions to potential issues.

“B.C. will continue to keep a strong focus on science-based decisions as we learn to adjust the delivery of education during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Stephanie Higginson, president of the B.C. School Trustees Association. “Boards of education across the province will utilize updated health and safety measures, created on the advice of the provincial health officer, to ensure that students can continue to receive the social, emotional and academic supports provided by their community school during this critical time in education.”

Families will hear from their school district or independent school throughout the summer with updated health and safety guidelines for elementary, middle and secondary schools, as well as learning groups, schedules, enrolment and registration information with the final details being submitted to the ministry and posted online by the districts on Aug. 26, 2020.

“The safety of students and staff is paramount and government will continue to make science-based decisions, following the expert advice of Dr. Henry and her public health team,” Fleming said.

Quotes:

Andrea Sinclair, president, BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) –

“BCCPAC thanks our dedicated board members who have

worked on the different restart committees to ensure equity, inclusion, health and safety, and educational programming remain at the forefront in the planning for a return to school in September. Parents should feel assured that as things progress and evolve over the coming weeks, the Ministry of Education will be working directly with BCCPAC and our education partners to ensure student safety remains a top priority.”

Paul Faoro, president, CUPE BC –

“We are pleased to see the provincial government recognize the critical work our members do to keep schools clean, safe and inclusive. The additional investment of resources will help ensure the necessary level of custodians to ensure that schools are properly cleaned and that students and staff are safe in our schools. The June reopening of schools showed that under the guidance of provincial health officer Bonnie Henry, we can safely welcome students and staff back to schools in September. We look forward to continuing to work with the provincial government and all education partners to ensure we’re all ready for September.”

Learn More:

For more information on the K-12 Education Restart Plan, visit: [gov.bc.ca/covid19returntoschool](https://gov.bc.ca/covid19returntoschool)

To find a local school district, visit:

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/bcmap.htm>

Two backgrounders follow.