

January 13, 2022

Dear Families:

**Return to in-person learning on Monday, January 17, 2022**

The Ministry of Education has now confirmed media reports that students will return to in-person learning on Monday, January 17, 2022. HPEDSB staff are actively working to prepare for this return, including establishing processes to confirm daily COVID-19 screening, and other health and safety measures. Thank you for your continued patience as we work through these important details.

We understand how important it is for students to be learning in-person, alongside their peers, to support their well-being, mental health and development. We remain committed to the health and safety of our school communities while providing students with a learning experience that allows them to reach their full potential.

**Please be aware that students and staff must do COVID-19 screening each day, regardless of access to testing and must isolate if symptomatic, regardless of vaccination status and/or test access.**

We know you have a number of questions about the return to school. **This letter outlines key information you need to know now.** Please refer to our [Return to Learning Plan](#) for more information.

**Asynchronous learning on Friday, January 14:** In order to prepare for the return to in-person learning with the newly released guidance, remote learning on **Friday, January 14, 2022 will be asynchronous.** Students will be able to access learning materials from their online classroom that day. Staff will be available to answer questions and support students for the first hour of the school day. Students who are already attending in-person learning as part of Regional/Special Education programs, will continue to attend in-person on Friday. Students who attend the Virtual School will participate in synchronous learning, as usual.

We appreciate your flexibility and patience during the switch between remote and in-person learning. Our schools and staff are looking forward to welcoming students back and reconnecting in-person. We ask for your continued support and flexibility as we navigate the impacts of the current wave of the pandemic.

**What to expect if schools experience staff shortages:** The Omicron variant is affecting many services and families in our community. We are concerned that schools may experience staff shortages, similar to other organizations in our communities and throughout the province. If schools do not have enough staff to safely operate due to illness or staff isolation requirements, it may be necessary for classrooms or schools to return to remote learning for a short period of time. In those circumstances, we will communicate with you as soon as possible. We recognize the switch to remote learning will cause challenges. Please refer to the *School Closures* section of the [Return to Learning Plan](#) for more information.

**In-person learning responsibilities:** Returning to in-person learning brings new requirements for students, families and staff. As you prepare for your child to return to in-person learning, please do the following each morning before sending your child to school:

- [Screen for COVID-19 symptoms every day](#). If your child does not pass screening or feels ill, they must not go to school. Classroom teachers will be confirming that students have screened each morning.
- Ensure your child is dressed appropriately for the weather as outdoor learning and breaks are encouraged for all grades.
- Review the isolation requirements in case your child or someone in your household has COVID-19 symptoms, or tests positive, and self-isolation is required. Refer to the attached PDF *You have symptoms and are concerned you may have COVID-19. Now what?* for more information.

**Rapid antigen tests for students and staff:** When students return to school next week, all in-person elementary students, and staff who come into contact with students, will be provided two rapid antigen tests. The two rapid antigen tests are to be used when individuals are symptomatic. We anticipate rapid antigen test kits for secondary school students will be available later in the week. Rapid antigen tests are also being made available for all school bus drivers, with an initial supply of two tests per individual. Please refer to page 2 of the [COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Schools and Child Care: Omicron Surge Guidance](#).

**Case, contact and outbreak management for schools:** A significant change for families is the Ministry of Health guidance on case, contact and outbreak management for schools and child care settings. According to this guidance, public health will no longer inform students and families when a positive COVID-19 case has been identified in a class or bus cohort and will not notify close contacts. Schools will report absence data through the provincial reporting tool. Please refer to page 7 of the [COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Schools and Child Care: Omicron Surge](#) and the HPEDSB [Return to Learning Plan](#). Please be aware that school administrators will not share student or staff personal health information with other families or staff unless directed by the Medical Officer of Health.

**Student learning:** Educators will update online classrooms to ensure that students who are unable to attend in-person instruction have access to learning materials. Please be sure to maintain contact with your child's classroom teacher if your child is absent from school. Other options for student learning can be found in the [Return to Learning Plan](#).

I acknowledge that these are challenging times. Please be assured that HPEDSB staff are working hard to plan for and support the many and varied student circumstances. Staff will continue to provide assistance to keep students engaged in learning. I encourage you to contact your child's educator or principal with any questions or concerns.

As always, continue to follow public health directives for handwashing, mask wearing and physical distancing. Be kind, understanding and patient as we all navigate the return to in-person learning.

Be well and take care,



Katherine Maclver  
Director of Education