



# SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

## S O U T H E A S T K O O T E N A Y

December 31, 2021

Dear students, staff, parents, caregivers, and community members:

Our hope is that you had a wonderful holiday with your friends and family and were able to recharge and reconnect with the activities that you love to do. While the snow is deep and the weather is chilly, it is a wonderful time to live in the East Kootenays and enjoy what the outdoors has to offer.

Schools will be open for staff on Tuesday, January 4 as well as for the care of health care workers' school aged children (age 5-12), for the children of school staff, and for essential service workers' children. As well, our schools are providing care for students who need additional connection to school.

***Schools will not be providing regular instruction for this first week.*** Please contact your principal if your children will be attending school on Tuesday, January 4th under the guide listed above. Busses will be running as per usual.

**We look forward to welcoming all our students back on January 10<sup>th</sup> for regular instruction.**

On Tuesday, school and district staff will start to plan for the new protocols that are in place. Due to the recent rise in COVID-19 cases in BC and the emergence of the more transmissible Omicron variant, the Ministry of Health and Education have provided Addendums to their Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools and Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings on December 29, 2021 (links for these resources are included below). These Guidelines lay out amended protocols with the following items of note:

- Indoor capacity limits for school gatherings and events (including extracurricular) are restricted to 50% operating capacity and spectators are not allowed;
- All school gatherings will be held virtually, where possible;
- All educational activities will not require proof of vaccination;
- Schools will be implementing strategies to prevent crowding during class transition and break times (i.e., staggered start/stop times, recess, etc.);
- Schools will be limiting visitors to those who are supporting activities that are of direct benefit to student learning and wellbeing (i.e., teacher candidates, immunizers, meal program volunteers, etc.). All visitors will be required to follow school communicable disease plans and complete a daily health check before entering the building;
- Extracurricular sports tournaments will be paused; and
- All students, staff, and visitors will be required to wear a mask indoors at school under the [PHO Order – Face Coverings](#).

Our schools will be updating their communicable disease plans next week to incorporate these additional measures and these will be posted on the schools' websites by January 10<sup>th</sup>.

The Ministry noted that there is no significant change to their recommended prevention measures which include completing a daily health check, staying home when sick, regularly washing hands, and wearing a well-fitted mask. Vaccines continue to be one of the best prevention measures and the Ministry recommends everyone eligible to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Please refer to the following embedded links for the addendums noted above:

[Addendum – Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)

[Addendum - Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#)

Additionally, please refer to the [Provincial Restriction website](#) as well as the [Interior Health website](#) for the most up to date information and let us know if you have any questions.

The health and safety protocols that are being put into place are not new to our schools, but we will need time to discuss with staff and ensure we are ready to go for January 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Continuity of learning plans and functional closure plans if required.**

Next week, school and district staff will also be looking at the continuity of learning plans for our students. If we have several staff who are away sick, we may not be able to offer an in-school learning experience for our students and will then move to online learning. There would be a one day turn around for staff to pivot to online learning. We anticipate this may be up to two weeks, and once we have enough staff returning, we would then return to the school for in-person learning.

There will also be more information coming from the Ministry of Education and the Provincial Health Officer on how cases will be confirmed in schools. We are sensing that there will no longer be contact tracing and exposure notices due to the more transmissible Omicron variant and we should get an update soon.

We are really looking forward to welcoming all our students back on January 10<sup>th</sup>. While the COVID pandemic continues, schools will look very similar to what it has looked like since September with the enhanced safety protocols put into place.

Staff and students will be prepared to go to online learning depending on the situation. It is not easy for teachers to “pivot” quickly and having this time next week to plan will be important.

Now more than ever, it is very important for all of us to be diligent with mask wearing, hand washing, daily health checks, getting vaccinations if eligible, and mostly being kind to each other.

2022 will not be 2021 and we are optimistic for a brighter, healthier year for all. Take care of yourselves, and please watch for more communication in the weeks to come.

Silke Yardley, Superintendent

Nick Taylor, Secretary-Treasurer