

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES CIRCULAR

Date: September 4, 2020

CIRCULAR NUMBER COVID#: 2020-142

TO: All CDS and CLDS Staff

Subject: **Return to School for Children with Special Learning Needs**

Program: **Children's disABILITY Services / Adult Disability Services**

Type: Policy For Internal Reference Only
 Procedure Information Only

Effective Date Immediately and in effect until further notice

Manitoba Education's *Welcoming Our Students Back* plan emphasizes the importance of getting students back into classrooms for in-person learning while focusing on safety and health. On September 2, 2020, the Department of Education issued additional information materials for students, parents and educators as families prepare for an informed return to schools. Materials focus on learning to adjust and manage the risks around COVID-19. Guidance documents can be found [online](#) and include [guidance specifically for children with special learning needs](#).

Children with Special Learning Needs Prioritized for In-Class Learning

Full-time in-class learning is a priority for students who benefit from face-to-face interaction with their teachers and peers, and who may have difficulties navigating remote learning independently. Therefore:

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 students will return for five days of full, in-class instruction per week.
- Students in Grades 9 to 12 will return for up to five days per week of in-class instruction if high schools can effectively implement physical distancing and the use of cohorts. Students should expect some remote learning, along with in-class instruction.
- Students with special needs in all grades will return for five days of full, in-class instruction per week.

According to *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services (2006)*, students with special needs are those who require specialized services or programming when deemed necessary by the in-school team because of exceptional learning, social/emotional, behavioural, sensory, physical, cognitive/intellectual,

communication, academic, or health-care needs that affect their ability to meet learning outcomes.

Student-Specific Planning

Many parents have concerns around resuming in-class learning. These concerns should be communicated to the child's school team so that planning can take into account the child's unique learning needs. Schools are expected to communicate directly and frequently with families to provide them with information about the school year and ongoing plans for instruction and supports. Communication is key to building confidence.

Effective use of the Student-Specific Planning Process is essential at this time. Student-specific plans (e.g., adaptation plans, modification plans, individual education plans, behaviour intervention plans, health care plans, personal transportation plans) are key in supporting students with special needs and students at risk as they transition back to in-class learning. Student-specific plans may need to be reviewed and adjusted more frequently to ensure effective supports, strategies, and services are maintained or adjusted whether the students are in class or in remote learning environments.

Families should contact their classroom teacher or school principal if they have questions about the learning plan for their child. Families should be encouraged to lead discussions on student-specific planning so that their questions, concerns and ideas are heard. Service providers in the school and in the family's support network can assist by sharing information that can support planning.

Remote Learning

For students who are medically advised not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-19 related factors, the Department of Education is not asking that medical notes be provided. However, specific school divisions might require a medical note and will provide details about any exemptions required. These situations should be rare and limited to students with compromised immunity. Reasons that are behavioural in nature (e.g., behaviours that create challenges to meeting public health guidelines on physical distancing) should be addressed with a behavioural or adaptation plan in the school so that the child can be safely accommodated in the learning environment.

Remote learning is organized at the division level (not in-class teacher) and may be coordinated across divisions. School divisions or schools will follow up with families to explain the learning expectations and parent/caregiver support required. Necessary planning would occur through the student-specific planning process. Not all learning supports are transferable to a remote, online learning environment.

The remote learning approach will require parent involvement and support. Parents of children with special learning needs should be encouraged to consider what conditions need to be in place to support a safe return to school for their child so that planning can take place toward that goal.

Homeschooling

If parents/guardians choose to keep their compulsory school age children at home when school returns, they need to register with Manitoba's Homeschooling Office. Information about homeschooling can be found [here](#). It is important to note that students who are receiving homeschooling receive no supports from Manitoba Education or the local school division. Caregivers are responsible for obtaining resources and materials, and no high school credits are granted.

Use of Masks

New [guidance](#) has been provided on mask use in schools. An exemption for mask use is provided for anyone who:

- cannot wear a mask as described in the guide;
- is unable to remove the mask without assistance (e.g., due to age, ability, or developmental status);
- is actively having breathing difficulties; or
- is under two years of age.

If a parent is concerned about their child's ability to safely wear a mask, they should speak with their child's doctor. If the child is either unable to properly wear a mask or has a medical condition that does not allow them to wear a mask, the parent must provide written notification to the child's school outlining the child's limitations with wearing a mask. A note from a health-care provider is **not required**.

- Note: a face shield is **not** a replacement for a non-medical mask.

CDS Family Supports

Additional respite and employment supports may be assessed as appropriate during the opening two months of the school year while families are developing a safe back to school plan with their school team. Employment supports can be provided for children over the age of 12 during the 14-day COVID self-isolation period, and additional respite may be provided to assist families who are required to self-isolate. This is dependent on families being able to find a self-managed provider willing to come into their home, or a direct support provider following all public health guidelines. Small increases in respite can be considered where families are taking on homeschooling responsibilities.

However, respite is not a replacement for academic learning.

Thank you for your dedicated work during this critical and unprecedented time towards supporting children to attend and engage in school and learning.

For any questions related to this circular, please contact the CDS A/Program Specialist Andrew Donachuk (204-794-6016).

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