

Nova Scotia's

BACK TO SCHOOL PLAN

Executive Summary



SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER

We know the best place for children is in the classroom and with the support of Public Health, IWK, educators, and support workers students will return to class on September 8.

Teachers will offer the same classes and same curriculum but the schools and daily school routine will look slightly different. For instance, students can expect to see lots of hand-cleaning stations in their schools, and lots of signs about the importance of good hand hygiene. Desks will be physically separated in classrooms, and there may be staggered timetables to reduce children mixing in the hallways. Teachers will be encouraged to move classes outside where possible, and exercise will be promoted. At the high school level, masks will be mandatory in hallways and common areas for students and teachers.

What won't change this year is a quality education. Nova Scotia's teachers, educators and support staff will continue to deliver safe, equitable education to their students. In fact, the education system gained valuable experience during the Spring, and those insights will translate into reality when classes start.

Thanks to your input, and the input of students and teachers, we know access to computers is an issue for many families. So, the province secured 14,000 new and refurbished computers that will be given to students who need them.

We know that teachers can do more to connect individually with students and families, so we are setting expectations for teachers around communications and learning.

Beginning in September, teachers will undertake a comprehensive assessment of where students are in their learning. And teachers and schools will provide a supportive environment with supports so students can transition back to school and the new COVID routines



Children need safe and supportive learning environments and that means being back in school with their peers. Our plan supports the full, safe return of students and staff, while allowing us to adapt how students will learn if anything changes.

Zach Churchill,
Minister of Education and Childhood Development

HEALTH MEASURES / CLOSING OF SCHOOL

Since COVID-19 is part of our new reality, we are taking steps to reduce risk for everyone in our school system. Masks will be mandatory on buses, school assemblies are cancelled, and parent-teacher nights will be held online or over the phone, to name only a few of our health measures. Students and staff will be required to self-screen for possible COVID-19 symptoms before coming to school, and those who feel ill during the day will go home. Each school will have an isolation space where children can wait for their parents to arrive. Cleaning of high-touch surfaces in schools will take place regularly.

If someone in school contracts COVID-19, Public Health will be alerted immediately. We will take our lead from Dr. Robert Strang and his team at Nova Scotia Public Health as to how to respond. Public Health may advise one school to close, or a family of schools to close. Or the school may stay open if there is no reason to close. But the decision about when to close schools is a Public Health decision.

100% / BLENDED LEARNING (REDUCED CLASS SIZE, OLDER CHILDREN LEARN AT HOME) / LEARN AT HOME

Our plan is for students to return to the classroom. IWK has advised that a very small number of students may need to learn from home for health reasons, and we are taking steps to support those people with a quality education. For everyone else, it will be a nearly normal school experience.

But if Public Health requires a shift in approach, Nova Scotia's education system is ready to move to a different learning model. If there is an increase in COVID-19 cases, the province may require Grades 9 to 12 students to learn from home while younger children – Pre-primary to Grade 8 – learn in school in smaller classrooms. This blended learning model keeps younger children in school but reduces class size to enable everyone to be socially distanced by 2 metres. These restrictions may apply to a single school, family of schools or entire school regions. These decisions will be made by public health in consultation with regional and provincial education leaders.

In the blended learning model, students who need additional supports of any age and grade and those without internet at home will attend school. Secondary classes with specialized settings, like skilled trades will continue with modified schedules. Additionally, classrooms with socially distanced desks will be made available for secondary students to make appointments for extra help from teachers or others.

If the province moves to a Learn at Home model, there will be enhanced expectations for teachers related to online teaching and learning. Students without internet will receive class assignments via telephone and USB sticks. All students who need a computer or technology device will be provided a device.

FLEXIBILITY AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

The province's Back to School plan contains directions and guidance for Regional Centres for Education and CSAP. Implementation work has begun by these education leaders, principals, and support staff. Teachers have enrolled in summer learning programs developed based on feedback they provided at the end of at home learning. Regions/CSAP will be responsible for organizing classrooms, putting up handwashing signs and floor direction decals. Regions and principals will be communicating about this work and about how to support children to get ready for a different kind of school year.

If the province moves to Blended Learning, regions with small school populations may be able to keep all children in school if there is space and they can schedule grades 9-12 classes to keep student cohorts intact.

STUDENTS WHO NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

Nova Scotia's education system provides excellent supports to students to support Inclusive Education. Those supports will continue. In September, all services will be offered to students when they return to school. If we move to a Blended Learning model, all children receiving specialist services will be able to access them in person, even if their grade cohort is staying home. If we move to learning at-home, we will continue to provide services through conference calls, video and other online technologies.

AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN AND MI'KMAQ STUDENTS

We recognize the importance of involving students, families, and communities in the decision-making process as it relates to programing, as well as truly listening to their voice to understand the student. We recognize the importance of reaching out to students who were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 situation – especially our African Canadian and Mi'kmaq students – to understand the gaps in learning opportunities that they may have experienced and to provide them with new opportunities. We heard loud and clear about their challenges accessing technology, which is why we have a strong plan for access to technology. We also look to our Inclusive Education Policy as a vehicle for helping these students thrive in our education system.

TECHNOLOGY / INTERNET

We are planning an extensive roll-out of tech equipment for students who do not have a device or have limited access to a device. Over 14000 new and refurbished devices have been ordered for this Fall. Students without internet will attend school unless there is a stay-at-home order issued. If the province moves to a learn at home model, teachers will communicate assignments for these students via the transfer of USB sticks and via the telephone.

ASSESSMENT

Report cards will be issued for all subjects as in previous school years. Parents are encouraged to sign up for the parent portal in PowerSchool as it allows for families to receive e-report cards. Teachers will give marks and grades in all areas as per normal practice. Provincial examinations (English 10, Français 10, and Mathematics / Mathématiques 10) will take place.

PRE-PRIMARY

We are moving ahead with our commitment to Pre-Primary. We worked extensively with Public Health and IWK on the re-opening of licenced child care. Similar principles and best practices including extensive hand washing and cleaning of high-touch surfaces will apply to pre-primary children.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- School classrooms are being reorganized to create more space between desks and to limit physical contact.
- Hand cleaning will be required before entering the school and classrooms
- Students are encouraged to bring masks to school. If they forget, a mask will be provided
- Bussing:
 - school transportation and bussing is returning; masks are mandatory on buses as per the order by Public Health
 - Buses will be cleaned twice daily
- Holiday Concerts / Assemblies / Parent – Teacher Nights
 - There will be no large in-person gatherings such as assemblies and holiday concerts. Parent-teacher nights will be held virtually.
- Sports:
 - The Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation has developed a plan for return of some but not all sports. This plan will be consistent with Sport Nova Scotia guidelines approved by Public Health.

HOW NOVA SCOTIA'S BACK TO SCHOOL PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

- This plan was developed with input from teachers, principals, union leaders, public health officials and the Pediatric Advisory group at the IWK Health Centre.
- Dr. Robert Strang, Nova Scotia's Chief Medical Officer of Health, provided public health direction, working closely with educators and experts at the IWK.
- 28,000 parents, guardians, students participated in a survey about their educational experience. As a result of feedback, parents and students will have a predictable online learning schedule if we move to online learning, with a variety of learning supports, including assignments and video, feedback and assessment of learning for all students.

The full plan can be found at:

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/back-to-school-plan.pdf>



Government has a back to school plan with the appropriate public health measures to support the return of students and staff.

Pediatricians across the province agree with this direction because the best place for our children and youth is in school, where they can receive enhanced learning, mental, social, and physical well-being, and school support services such as breakfast programs. During the Pandemic, our Provincial Pediatric Advisory Group will continue to review worldwide evidence, and work with parents, Education and Public Health leaders to ensure we best reduce COVID risks and promote student well-being.

Dr. Andrew Lynk,
Chief of Pediatrics, IWK Health Centre