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Back to School Parent Information for 2020-2021

As detailed in the Nova Scotia Back to School Plan, there will be new routines and changes in effect this school year. To help families navigate these changes, we have created this back to school information resource for you.

What to Expect at School This Year:

Before School

- **At-Home Monitoring and Self-Screening for COVID-19:**
 - On a daily basis, families are required to monitor and self-screen children for COVID-19 symptoms before sending them to school and/or on the school bus using the attached [COVID-19 Daily Checklist](#). The most up-to-date version of the Checklist can be found online at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf>. By monitoring daily, you are helping to identify any potential cases of COVID-19 as quickly as possible.
 - Children/students need to stay home when they are ill, even if their symptoms are mild. All individuals with symptoms should be assessed through 811 to determine whether COVID-19 testing is required. If COVID-19 testing is required, individuals must follow public health advice for returning to school. If testing for COVID-19 is not required, they can return once fever (with no medications) and other symptoms have resolved for 24 hours. Individuals assessed to have only chronic stable symptoms (e.g. cough, sneeze, runny nose, or nasal congestion) due to a medical condition such as asthma or allergies are not required to be excluded. Individuals with new or worsening symptoms must not enter and should be reassessed.
 - If you are unsure if you or your child should self-isolate, please contact 811 for direction.
 - If your child becomes ill during the day, please pick them up promptly from school. Please also ensure that the school has your most up-to-date contact information.

- **Mandatory Non-Medical Masks in Schools:**
 - Non-medical masks are required for students in Grades 4-12 and all school staff while in school, even if they are in their cohort, if they cannot physically distance. They must also be worn in hallways and other common areas by everyone if a two metre/six feet distance cannot be maintained.
 - Students may remove their masks during indoor physical activity when a mask cannot be worn, when they are eating and drinking. Masks are not required during outside activities.
 - Each student and staff member will be provided with two free reusable non-medical cloth masks. Disposable masks will also be available if a child/student forgets or loses their mask during the day.

- **Mandatory Non-Medical Masks on School Buses:**
 - As per the Public Health Order, all riders, regardless of grade, and staff will be required to wear non-medical masks while riding the bus.
 - While riding school buses, children/students from the same household must sit together.
 - Parents/guardians will also be required to wear a non-medical mask if they enter the bus to buckle or unbuckle their child.
 - Hygiene practices including hand washing/clean hands prior to boarding the bus and getting off the bus after school, and cough and sneeze etiquette must be followed.
 - Children/students who travel by school bus are required to wear a mask until they get off the bus and can clean their hands and safely store their mask.
 - Buses will be cleaned twice daily. High touch surfaces such as handrails will be cleaned before and after each run.
 - Although we are all getting used to wearing non-medical masks in public places, we know wearing a mask may be a new experience for children/students, and that is why education and communication will be key in helping them understand why it is needed and how to wear it. We need parents and guardians help to get children/students used to wearing a mask. We know it may take time for some children/students, and some children/students with sensory or health issues may not be able to tolerate wearing a mask. We are asking parents/guardians to please speak with your children and practice wearing a mask as part of your usual getting ready to go back to school routine.
- **Water Bottle**
 - Water bottles are recommended as water fountains will not be accessible; bottle filling stations or water coolers will be available. Sending your child with a full water bottle in the morning is recommended and appreciated.

Getting to School

- Once students who travel by bus arrive at school, bus unloading will be staggered allowing less traffic entering the school at one time. Students getting off a bus as one group will wash/sanitize their hands as they enter their separate classrooms and join their cohorts within the school.
- Parents who drive children to school will drop off and pick-up students outside the building. For our elementary schools, our staff will be waiting to welcome our younger students into the building.
- Please stick to the following drop-off and pick up times for our school:
 - Drop Off between 8:30 and 8:45
 - Pick up between 2:40 and 2:50.

During the School Day

Hygiene Practices

- Hand Hygiene: There will be an emphasis on hand washing when entering the school/classroom, before and after eating/drinking/handling food/outdoor activities and regularly during the day. Hand sanitizing stations have been installed at main entrances and throughout the school.
- Cough and Sneeze Etiquette: Practice cough etiquette by coughing and sneezing into your sleeve or a tissue and discard immediately.
- There is a “no-sharing” policy on food, personal belongings and individual school supplies.

School Design/Signage

- Students in Pre-Primary to Grade 9 will stay with their class (cohort) throughout the day, where possible.
- Classrooms will have less material and furniture, and desks/tables will be spaced out allowing students to have more physical distance.
- Students will notice additional signage including directional signs to control flow in hallways, common areas, and outside spaces. Signage includes traffic flow arrows, physical distancing reminders, and designated entrances and exits.
- Lockers will not be in use for the 2020-2021 school year.

Ventilation

- The SRCE Operations staff manage the maintenance of our buildings and ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and routine maintenance like filter changes are performed as required.
- The SRCE Operations staff is currently conducting a school-by-school assessment of the ventilation air handler systems and working to ensure all rooms have operable windows to increase air flow.
- We will continue to ensure any ventilation issues that may arise are immediately addressed.

Visitors

- We will limit outside visitors, including parents/guardians.
- Only visitors who are required to provide essential services will be permitted into the schools at this time.
- Anyone who is deemed an essential visitor will need to have a pre-scheduled appointment to access the school or be invited to the school by the principal/designate.
- All visitors to the school are required to observe all COVID-19 health protocols.
- Drop offs and pickups will be done outside, and people will not be allowed to congregate in groups outside the school, as per the COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Schools (see Appendix A).

Use of Playground Equipment

- Currently, playground equipment can be used by children. Public Health will advise us if we need to restrict playground access.
- Children/students will be required to clean hands before re-entering the school/after outdoor activities/play.

School Schedule

- More classes (including Physical Education) will be held outdoors, when possible to encourage physical movement and support our students' well-being.
- All students will continue to be able to access healthy options through the school's Breakfast Program. There will be a focus on individual servings and access that is organized to prevent students from gathering.
- Students in Pre-primary to Grade 9 will eat lunch in their classrooms with their regular class or cohort of students; cafeterias will not be in use for lunchtime for these students. If your child is bringing their own lunch, please ensure it is something they can manage independently to avoid unnecessary handling of items by others.
- Microwaves will not be available at this time. If students require food from our lunch program, their meals will be delivered to their classroom to limit interactions among cohorts and social gathering.
 - Outside breaks during the lunch hour will be staggered by class cohorts.
 - Breaks/Recess: Students will have breaks with their class on a staggered schedule.
- Students in Grades 10-12 will have access to cafeteria services, although lunch options may be reduced. The food services provider will follow public health guidelines. An emphasis will still be placed on keeping groups of students together and maintaining physical distancing.

Illness at School

- If a child feels unwell or begins to exhibit COVID-19 symptoms, a parent or guardian will be contacted for pick-up. **It is very important to ensure your contact information and other emergency contacts for your child are kept up to date with the school during the school year.**
- Any student who becomes unwell at school will have a separate location in the school in which to wait until they are picked up. Students who become ill during the day will not be permitted to return home on the bus.
- If a child exhibits COVID-19 symptoms, parents/guardians must contact 811 to receive advice from Public Health on what to do next, including if/when the child can return to school.
- Our schools will continue to monitor illness in schools and will follow direction from Public Health on specific processes.
- Parents are asked when they are calling the school to excuse their child, if they could please provide as much detail as they are comfortable, so we can provide Public Health with accurate information on our illness data.
- If a COVID-19 case is identified, Public Health will take the lead. Public Health already has protocols in place to deal with communicable diseases. They will work with our school to inform families about what happened, what they need to do, and steps the school and the SRCE is taking.

Bus Passes

- As outlined in the School Transportation Policy, for the purposes of providing transportation services, each student is limited to one primary residence address and one alternate address. As part of our measures related to COVID-19 this year, bus passes are not permitted. Any special requests should be forwarded to SRCE Transportation at 902-747-3645.

After the School Day

- Formal Before and After School Programs will continue for children. Additional information about their programming will be provided by the provider.
- Information about school sports will be released by the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation.
- Parents/Guardians can help reinforce proper COVID-19 hygiene protocols with children. Please help us to remind children about proper handwashing techniques, cough/sneeze etiquette, how to wear a mask properly, and physical distancing.

More information on COVID-19 Specific Changes for the 2020-2021 school year

- *Technology* - Students are able to bring their own device to school for educational purposes. Students who do not have access to a personal device will be provided with one. School-based devices will be cleaned between use.
- *Families with specialized needs* will work together with their school's Student Planning Team. Please contact the school to further discuss your child's needs.

Supporting Documents/Additional Information

As we continue to prepare to return to in-class learning, please help us remind children/students about the new routines and public health protocols by taking a few minutes to review the following supporting documents:

[How to Wear a Mask](#)

[Proper Hand Washing Procedures](#)

- [Hand Washing Hero Video](#)

[Cough and Sneeze Etiquette](#)

- [Reduce the spread of COVID-19: Hygiene for kids – video](#)

[Physical Distancing](#)

We will be sharing additional school-specific information with you soon. In the meantime, if you have any specific questions regarding your child's return to school, please contact us at 902 – 787 – 5220 or email at lisa.maceachern@srce.ca or dayna.macdonald@srce.ca.