

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

April 27, 2020

Dear Parents,

I want to thank you most sincerely for the great support you have given your children so they could continue to learn during these last few weeks, under conditions that have sometimes been difficult.

The overall epidemiological situation has improved thanks to the high level of compliance you and all Quebecers have shown with regard to the social isolation measures that were introduced at the start of the crisis. As a result, we are able to begin a progressive, cautious and safe reopening of schools.

The plan for the gradual return to classes was prepared in collaboration with the director of the Direction de la santé publique, Dr. Horacio Arruda, and his team. It will enable students to return to school to consolidate their learning and finish acquiring essential learning by the end of the school year, while minimizing the risks of spreading COVID-19.

Plan for the progressive return to classes

As of May 11, preschools and elementary schools will reopen in all regions, with the exception of schools located in the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (Montréal metropolitan community), which will reopen on May 19, provided the situation allows it.

Regular school childcare services will resume as the schools reopen.

In all cases, schools will apply the strict health and physical distancing measures issued by the public health authorities. Specifically, classrooms will be restricted to a maximum of 15 students, with a distance of 2 metres to be maintained between individuals. School transportation services will also need to comply with these new standards.

This reopening will be continuously monitored and reassessed.

Secondary schools will remain closed until September 2020. Students will still be able to consolidate and continue their distance learning thanks to increased pedagogical support from the school team. A work and activities plan will be issued every week, and school personnel will be available to accompany students until the end of the school year.

The return to school raises some concerns and that is completely normal. Let me reassure you that schools are obliged to apply the strict safety and hygiene measures recommended by the public health authorities.

A voluntary return to class

If you are the parent of a preschooler or elementary school student, please note that this gradual return to class is voluntary. Children can continue their learning at home, if that is what their parents decide. In that case, the school will provide pedagogical support at a distance.

Although this return to class is voluntary, **I very strongly encourage** parents of children with learning difficulties or social maladjustments to choose to send them back to their classes as soon as possible so that they can benefit from the best pedagogical support from their teachers and teams of professionals at school. The parents to whom this applies will soon be contacted by their schools.

If you, your child or anyone else living in your home has a health condition that makes them vulnerable (e.g. chronic disease, severe immunodeficiency), your child should stay home and continue learning at a distance.

We are asking parents to contact their school as quickly as possible and inform the school of their decision, whether it is to send their children back to school, or not. By informing the school at least a week before the planned reopening, you will help the administrators to welcome the students back under the best possible conditions, while complying with the strict recommendations from the public health authorities. You will receive a communication to this effect in the next few days.

Preparations for the resumption of pedagogical activities

Obviously, the upcoming return to school will be very different from those you have experienced before. The children must comply with very strict safety and hygiene measures. Members of the school staff will explain these measures to the children but we are counting on your help to make sure that they are respected.

If you are the parent of preschoolers or elementary school students and you opt for their return to class:

- Make sure your children wash their hands thoroughly before they leave the house in the morning and when they return home.

- School transportation services will be reduced to the minimum and there will be some major limitations imposed in order to comply with the recommendations issued by the public health authorities. We are therefore encouraging you to make other arrangements, unless this is absolutely impossible. If your children must use school transportation services, please remind them of the importance of avoiding contact with the other students.
- Inside the school, non-essential common spaces such as the gyms and libraries will be closed. The schoolyard will be accessible but with major restrictions and in turns. The goal is to ensure that the different groups are isolated from each other and to minimize risks. Once again, we ask you to remind your children to avoid contact with the other students, especially with those in groups other than their own.
- The cafeteria will be closed. If your children normally eat at school, make sure that they bring their lunch to school every day. If your children come home for lunch, they can continue to do so but the same hand-washing measures still apply when they leave the house in the morning and when they return home.
- Outside of school hours, it is important not to let your children be around people with a health condition that makes them vulnerable (e.g. chronic disease, severe immunodeficiency, pregnancy or breastfeeding, aged 60 or older).

If you are the parent of preschoolers or elementary school students and you have decided that they will continue their learning at home, or if you are the parent of secondary school students:

- To ensure that all students finish acquiring essential learning by the end of the school year, schools will be launching a major operation for lending technological equipment within the upcoming days. If you do not have a computer or a technological tool for accessing the Internet at home, please notify your school immediately.
- Make sure that your child is following the work plan and carrying out the activities provided by the school.
- Ensure that your child's learning is being monitored on a regular basis by the resource person who will be designated by your school and, if need be, call upon this person for assistance.

Whether your child is continuing their learning at school or at home, we want to let you know that the *Open School* website will be still be enhanced on a regular basis. In

addition, Télé-Québec will continue broadcasting its special programming online and on television until the end of the school year.

I know that you may have other questions about the end of the school year. I invite you to consult the documents attached to this message and to stay abreast of the more detailed instructions that your school will send you over the upcoming weeks.

In closing, I want to thank you again for your collaboration during this difficult period. We will get through this together and all will be well!

Yours sincerely,

Jean-François Roberge
Minister of Education and Higher Education

Encl.