

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Continuity of Learning

March 27 | 2020



Ministry of
Education

INTRODUCTION

The [British Columbia Ministry of Education](#) is working with all 60 school districts, independent school authorities, First Nations schools and education partners to support a coordinated approach in response to COVID-19. The health and safety of school staff, students, parents and communities is the highest priority.

To ensure B.C.'s K-12 education system supports the coordinated approach, the work will be guided by a set of principles to:

- 1| Maintain a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.
- 2| Provide the services needed to support children of our essential workers.
- 3| Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
- 4| Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

The Ministry of Education has developed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) with the latest developments and will continue to update them.

SECTION 1 | SUSPENDING IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION

Are K-12 schools in B.C. closed?

- No, schools are not closed. On March 17, 2020, under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), the Provincial Government directed all K-12 schools to immediately suspend in-class instruction until further notice.
- Since in-class instruction has been suspended, school districts and independent school authorities are currently reviewing and planning learning opportunities for students.
- It is up to local boards of education and independent school authorities to determine hours of operation for and access to school board offices and school offices.

Do the same rules apply for all schools, no matter of where they are located?

- In-person classroom instruction has been suspended for **all public and independent schools**, in British Columbia (B.C.). Most First Nations schools have also elected to follow this direction.
- The same rules apply regardless of whether schools are located in urban or rural areas.

- For information about how First Nations schools are approaching on-going learning, the individual First Nation or school principal should be contacted. Many First Nations schools are also posting regular updates through social media on their Facebook pages or Twitter accounts.

Why did the provincial government suspend in-person classes?

- Government has taken the advice of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) to suspend in-class instruction in K-12 schools across the province to ensure the health and safety of school staff, students, parents and communities is protected.
- While in-class instruction is suspended, K-12 schools are still open to ensure school district staff can continue to support operations in the school district and serve the needs of the community, even if in-class instruction is suspended.
- In order for educators and support staff to best serve the needs of students and the community, including providing supports to the children of Essential Service Workers (ESWs), schools need to remain open and school business must continue to be conducted as normally as possible. This is critical for supporting the ongoing functioning of our healthcare system and communities.
- The Ministry of Education will continue to follow the daily direction of public health officials and scientists in making fact-based decisions when it comes to B.C.'s school system.

Will child care facilities operating on school grounds be suspended?

- The provincial government under direction of the PHO has decided not to close child care programs at this time, although it is recognized that some childcare operators have made the decision to close on their own.
- Where child care is being operated in conjunction with K-12 schools, it's expected that boards of education and/or independent school authorities will determine ways to continue these services.
- The Ministry of Education is working closely with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to ensure children aged 0-12 of Essential Service Workers have access to care.
- MCFD is taking steps to support the child care sector while ensuring parents who must work during the COVID-19 pandemic continue to have access to child care, with [recently announced](#) new funding for providers.
- More information can be found on this [webpage](#) focused on childcare questions/answers and resources in response to COVID-19.

What type of safety protocols will be put in place in schools to keep staff and students safe?

- The Ministry has suspended in-person instruction and directed school districts and independent school authorities to develop plans to ensure on-going instruction, as well as services and supports for the children of essential service workers. The intent is that a limited number of students will be present in-person in schools at any given time in order to allow for sufficient physical distancing.
- The Ministry of Education will be working with the PHO and the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) to provide direction to school districts and independent school authorities on how to ensure the health and safety of staff and/or students who are present in schools now, and in the weeks ahead.

- At this time, the Ministry of Education is advising school districts and independent school authorities to consider how to:
 - Ensure schools continue to follow the highest standard of cleaning practices;
 - Promote and support physical distancing between staff and students in schools and offices; and
 - Control access to buildings to limit exposure.

Does the Provincial Health Officer's 50-person maximum rule apply to schools?

- The PHO's order is intended to prevent large groups of people from gathering in close quarters with one another. There could be more than 50 students and staff in a school at any given time if they are not all in one area at the same time and are actively engaged in physical distancing to the extent possible.
- School districts are considering how to prioritize in-person visits to schools and explore how to reserve these opportunities for those who need it most (i.e. children of essential service workers or students that will not be able to engage in learning easily from home).
- School districts are encouraged to work and communicate regularly with their local medical health officer in the health authority to ensure that protocols that are put in place in schools respect the guidelines provided by the PHO.

SECTION 2 | LEARNING/EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

What kind of learning opportunities for students should parents expect given that classes in schools have been suspended?

- Learning opportunities will look different during this time. Each school district and independent school authority will develop a plan that best responds to the needs of their local community. This could include measures such as online learning tools and/or resource packages or assignments e-mailed from teachers to parents.
- The Ministry of Education is working with school districts and independent school authorities to support them in their local planning efforts.
- On March 27, the Ministry of Education launched a [website for parents and students](#) which provides resources and information to support continuous learning at home.

When do learning opportunities for students begin?

- School districts and independent school authorities have been asked to put in place learning opportunities for students as soon as practically possible, no later than mid-April. They will be taking the time over the coming weeks to develop plans for how ongoing learning opportunities can be provided to students during this period of time.
- Each school district and independent school is expected to communicate with parents as soon as possible following their scheduled spring break about the learning opportunities that will be made available to students and when parents can expect to receive more information.

- If parents are seeking additional information on what to expect over the coming weeks, they should inquire with either their child's classroom teacher or school principal for more information.

How will online or remote learning work? What if I don't have a computer or if I have unreliable internet services?

- School districts and independent schools are developing plans for how they can deliver learning opportunities using alternative methods (i.e. not in-person), which could include online learning. The alternative approaches put in place in individual schools and classes may look slightly different depending on the students and families that these schools serve, which is why the planning needs to be completed at the local level.
- School districts and independent schools are in the process of gathering information from their families to inform their local planning process and this includes asking parents about access to technology within their homes.
- Some school districts and independent schools are considering loaning equipment for students and potential in-person learning options, based on a prioritization of need, to make sure all students have the tools they need to learn away from a school building.

What if I can't help my child with French, for example?

- School districts will work to best support parents and students with access to French learning resources.

What are my options if I want to homeschool my child?

- The Ministry of Education expects school districts and independent school authorities to send out communication to parents as soon as possible, keeping parents informed about their planning processes.
- [Homeschooling](#) is an alternative method of teaching offered outside the B.C. education system. Typically, a family member delivers the entire educational program to children at home, without direct support from teachers (other than assessments).

How can I support my child while they are learning remotely?

- In addition to the plans developed by school districts to provide out-of-classroom learning opportunities for students, the Ministry of Education is creating a website with home learning resources to help parents support their children while in-class instruction is suspended.
- The website is expected to launch on Friday, March 27, 2020 and will be updated over the coming weeks.

What kind of time commitment is required from parents who are working from home? What if I, as a parent, don't have the time to help my child? Will they still pass?

- The time commitment required from parents will depend on a number of factors including the grade level of the student and the approach used by the school and individual teacher.
- Some support from parents will likely be required, especially for younger children who may require explanations and guidance on how to approach home learning activities.
- For more details on expectations of parents, please connect with either your child's classroom teacher or the school principal in the coming weeks.

How do we collect our children's personal items from school?

- Each school district and independent school authority will be responsible for determining how best to permit access to schools and classrooms in order for parents to retrieve personal or educational items.
- Access to schools and classrooms will need to be carefully arranged in order to respect the guidelines established by the PHO on physical distancing.

SECTION 3 | SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND DIVERSE (SPECIAL) NEEDS

What supports will need to be in place for students with disabilities and diverse abilities?

- School districts and independent school authorities have been asked to ensure students with disabilities and diverse abilities have access to the same level of on-going learning as all other students. As a part of planning for on-going instruction, schools should be proactively identifying supports or accommodations that need to be made to support learning for students with disabilities and diverse abilities.

What supports are available to me if I am a parent of a child with a disability and I have no care options?

- School districts and independent school authorities have been asked to consider the care needs of parents of students with disabilities who have no other care options as a part of their planning for supporting the children of essential service workers.
- From a learning perspective, all students with disabilities and diverse abilities should have access to the same level of on-going instruction and support.

What about students who were receiving 1:1 supports or specialized supports? What are the expectations for continuity of service?

- School districts and independent school authorities have been asked to ensure students with disabilities and diverse abilities have access to the same level of on-going learning as all other students. For students who were receiving specialized supports (e.g. physical therapy, occupational therapy) on-site, school district and independent school teams have been asked to consider alternate service delivery models where feasible.
- For students who were receiving 1:1 service, school-based teams will work with families and caregivers to develop a plan for on-going learning and supports.

What about IEPs – will they continue?

- Yes, the individual learning goals identified in students' IEPs will continue to be a part of their learning.

What other supports are still in place for parents of students with disabilities?

- Most organizations that typically support families continue to be in service during this time; however, support may be offered in different ways. Families are encouraged to access supports from the agencies they are familiar with and have accessed prior to the pandemic.

- [The Family Support Institute](#) and [Inclusion BC](#) are both continuing to provide supports to families through new service delivery models during the pandemic.

What about extensions to autism funding or access to respite?

- The Ministry of Education is in close contact with the Ministry of Children and Family Development on this issue. Funding for autism services and respite falls under their area of responsibility and continued planning is underway on how to respond to some of the unique challenges faced by families. Access to Child and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) staffing, AIS BC and Autism Funding Branch continues to assist families to find the services and supports that meet their needs.

Will my child still have access to school meal programs or other services?

- School districts have been asked to ensure meal programs continue where possible in alignment with PHO guidelines. School districts with universal programs have been asked to prioritize families facing food insecurity.
- Meal programs will be delivered safely and in alignment with the directives from the Provincial Health Officer, which may require creative and innovative approaches.
 - School districts with existing meal programs are requested to continue to support students experiencing food insecurity in the community where possible. This will require re-assessing student need based on current context and engaging with community agencies to align supports.
 - School districts with universal meal programs may not need to continue to provide meals to all students; but should identify those families and students most in need and develop options for on-going meal service.
- Districts are also encouraged to partner with non-profits and community agencies on unique local approaches where possible.

SECTION 4 | MARKS, ASSESSMENTS AND GRADUATION

What will happen with graduation and student assessments this year?

- For grades 10 and 11 students, graduation assessments will be postponed.
- Every student eligible to graduate from Grade 12 this year will graduate. The only graduation assessment required for current Grade 12 students is the Grade 10 numeracy assessment.
- The Ministry of Education will ensure Grade 12 students who have not yet completed the Grade 10 numeracy assessment and who are otherwise on track to graduate are able to meet this graduation requirement.
- Teachers and Principals will support all students as part of the continuity of learning and help those students who may need additional supports to meet graduation requirements.
- All students will receive a report card based on where they were at prior to spring break plus the learning opportunities they're engaging in at home.
- The Ministry of Education is also working with post-secondary institutions to ensure graduating students will transition successfully.
- For more information, please read [B.C. Minister of Education Rob Fleming's letter on March 17](#) about assessments, marks and graduation for the remainder of the 2019/20 school year.

When will students receive transcripts for graduation?

- Transcripts remain available to students through the [Ministry of Education's Student Transcript Service](#). The transcripts will be updated when schools are able to report final marks.

Will Grade 12 students have more time to apply to Universities and Colleges?

- The Ministry of Education will be working closely with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training to support smooth transitions to post-secondary education for students.

SECTION 5 | PARENTS UNABLE TO STAY HOME AND ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Which jobs or professions have been designated as essential services in B.C.?

- Essential services are those daily services essential to preserving life, health, public safety and basic societal functioning. They are the services British Columbians rely on in their daily lives.
- On March 26, the provincial government released a [list of essential services in British Columbia](#) (see backgrounder at the end of the page).
- Going forward, child care providers and schools providing care and/or in-class instruction for children are to prioritize placements for those children whose parents are employed as front-line workers in direct to public health and health services, social services, law enforcement, first responders and emergency response.

If I'm an essential worker and cannot be at home to support my child's learning, where can I send my child?

- Parents should not bring their children to school on Monday March 30 as they usually would after spring break.
- However, essential front-line health care workers such as those directly involved in patient care - who need urgent care for their school-aged child the week of March 30th - are advised to contact their school principal as soon as possible to discuss care arrangements available during the first week back after spring break.
- Other parents who are deemed an Essential Service Worker (ESW) and who may need child care for their school-age children can expect to hear from their school regarding care options by Friday, April 3, 2020. Schools will be doing their best to accommodate urgent childcare needs while meeting the guidelines and directives of the Provincial Health Officer.
- The Ministry of Education expects school districts and independent schools to develop plans to maintain some level of service for children of people who are performing essential services across our province – services critical to preserving life, health and societal functioning.
- This may look different depending on the school district and possibly the school/community and could be childcare, educational instruction or a combination of the two.
- Please contact your school principal if direction has not been communicated to you within the coming week or so.

SECTION 6 | HEALTH AND SAFETY RESOURCES

What are the services and resources available to parents, students and staff to safeguard themselves from COVID-19?

- The province has launched a new non-medical information line for British Columbians who have questions about COVID-19: 1-888-COVID19. Phone lines are open 7 days a week from 7:30 AM to 8 PM, and information is available in more than 110 languages.
- B.C.'s COVID-19 website has many resources available at www.gov.bc.ca/covid19
- The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) website also has many resources for British Columbians who want more information about COVID-19, at <http://covid-19.bccdc.ca/>
- If you think you have symptoms, the Ministry of Health has developed an online self-assessment tool at covid19.thrive.health.
- If you have symptoms you can call 8-1-1 to pre-arrange health testing. If you have symptoms associated with COVID-19, self-isolate.

What can everyone do to stop the spread of COVID-19?

- Every British Columbian has a role to play in reducing the spread of this virus and protecting the people we love.
- The most important things people can do to limit the spread of the virus are:
 - Stay home as much as possible and limit contact with other people.
 - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds.
 - Avoid touching your face.