

Ey Swayel. Good morning everyone. It's September 8th and opening is upon us, and I wanted to share some key messages for you as you get ready for this week.

First and foremost, a big thank you to all of our staff in our schools and district on September 8th and September 9th, our days for health and safety orientation. It's why we did the delayed start so that our staff could be well prepared for receiving the students on Thursday and Friday. So that's an important two days for us in the district.

I want to talk specifically to parents about the importance of this week and the difference from previous years. If you are making the choice this week of whether you're going to have your child in regular school as normal, that's about 90% of our parents, or if you are choosing one of our blended program in either elementary or secondary, that choice is super important. And it's important that we know exactly where you're going to send your child, because we have to form students into the learning groups, and we want to get them in learning groups as quickly as possible to start the year. And in order to do that, we need to know who's coming to one program or the other.

If you do choose one of our blended programs, and I'm super excited about those programs, a reminder of the increased responsibility that places on you as a parent, our key education partner, and a big role in terms of the number of hours you're going to have to devote to your child and their learning. We know you do that anyway, but I just want to be really clear with you that when you make that choice, know you are taking on great responsibility. You'll absolutely have access to teachers and expert instruction, as always, but it's a big difference to be in an online blended program versus the regular program, so please make that choice wisely. The other part of what that choice is, remember that for elementary students the only re- entry date is January 1st. Once you commit to the program, you're committed until January. For our secondary students in Gr. 8 & 9, if you've chosen that program, then your natural re-entry date would be the end of quarters, so every 10 weeks. So just a reminder that when you make a choice for a blended program you're taking on increased responsibility as parents, and you're really aware of those re-entry points. Once again, we're excited about those programs and we believe they'll be fantastic. Whatever you choose to do, we support you. We just want you to make those decisions in an informed way, and we need to know which one you're choosing so we can form our learning groups.

Next for parents, a reminder that every day, your new routine is to check your child for symptoms. We don't want children coming to school if they're sick so please make this part of your new routine with your child. For staff, it's the same thing, checking yourselves for symptoms every day. We don't want people coming to work when they're sick, so make sure that is part of your new routine. Things like hand sanitizers and masks is just part of our new world as adults in education. And let's talk about masks, a reminder that masks are required for all staff and students in secondary schools when you're outside in high traffic areas. When you're in your learning group wearing masks is a choice. Dr. Bonnie Henry does not recommend that elementary students wear masks. Some people cannot wear a mask. They might have a medical condition, they might have a disability, so remember to treat everyone with respect. Whether they're wearing a mask or whether they are not wearing a mask, there might be a good reason. Even when you are wearing a mask, staff and students must try to maintain physical distancing when you're outside your learning group. Wearing a mask isn't the protection for everything, you still need to practice all the normal things that you do.

Opening day is upon us. This is a new era, it's a new world. We have 75,000 students that we are going to welcome back to school in one way or another on Thursday. I can tell you, for me, I'm super excited to get there. Communications is so important. Remember that the best communication comes from your school. It's your context, it's your child, so watch for updates from them. And finally, it goes without saying, a huge thank you to all those people that have worked over the summer, and in the coming weeks, to make this work, as well as it possibly can work. Thank you support staff, teachers, district staff, Principals and Vice Principals. I know that there were counselors working above and beyond their duty, hand timetabling secondary students this weekend. I know Principals and Vice Principals have been timetabling all summer. We think of all that our facilities staff and maintenance staff have done with relation to health and safety and getting our schools ready. All our teachers, in their preparation, and they're entering into a new era with the long blocks and where they may have never taught before. So it's a big ask and huge thanks goes out to them.

I know that whatever you choose as a parent, you'll be well served, and I look forward to being on that journey with you. I hope you have a great opening week. Hy'ce:pka. Take care. Stay well and thanks again.