

COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

The safety and well-being of our students, families and staff remains our district's highest priority. We recognize the importance of face-to-face learning and are committed to ensuring our students can continue to learn as safely as possible by following all appropriate measures to limit the spread of illness.

These measures include working closely with public health to:

- Routinely review COVID-19 cases in our schools.
- Continuously assess district and school safety plans and the measures being taken to protect staff and students. This includes environmental assessments of individual schools collaboratively with Fraser Health, district Health and Safety staff, school-based Health and Safety committees and unions.

WHAT DOES AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ENTAIL?

Each assessment is a comprehensive review of the school, based on assessment criteria jointly developed with our health and safety team and Fraser Health.

Each assessment includes a physical review of the site, interviews with key staff members at the site, and a review of procedures and protocols that are being implemented at the school. If the school is still in operation, the assessment occurs while classes are in session, providing an opportunity for the health authority to learn about the practical reality of a school setting during this pandemic and how the provincial guidelines are being implemented in our schools. The in-session visit is also kept confidential so that the team visits unannounced.

HOW MANY ASSESSMENTS HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED TO DATE?

To date, we have conducted three environmental assessments (École Panorama Ridge Secondary, Cambridge Elementary and Newton Elementary).

In addition, when there have been outbreaks or even large numbers of cases in specific areas or schools, we have gathered subject-specific teams together to review protocols. Most recently this was done for music, band and physical education (PE).

WHAT HAVE THESE ASSESSMENTS FOUND?

In each of the first three environmental assessments conducted in our district, there were strong common themes:



DAILY HEALTH CHECKS It is critical that staff and students conduct a health check every day prior to attending school. This check is a personal review of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and can help limit exposure and spread of illness. Anyone with symptoms should stay home and follow instructions on the checklist.



CLASSROOM CONFIGURATIONS It is critical that classrooms are organized in a manner that maximizes physical distancing to the greatest extent possible given the physical space available. This includes arranging desks so students are not face-to-face, not gathering a large number of students in one small area of the class for small group instruction, or having learning structures that require physical contact and/or students being in close proximity to each other, particularly when engaged in physical exercise. Seating plans should also be implemented.



NO SHARED SUPPLIES Each student should have their own set of supplies and classroom manipulatives (i.e. Lego, base 10, counters, etc.) should not be used unless they can be placed in individual bags that are labelled with a student's name. For items that are rotated, ensure they are out of service for 3 days prior to being used again. PE equipment and musical instruments should be assigned to specific cohorts for designated time frames before rotation and should be cleaned after use.



THE IMPORTANCE OF COHORTS It is critical that students remain in their cohorts, particularly during the time before schools starts, lunch breaks and after school. This has been particularly challenging in unsupervised areas such as school parking lots, school fields and neighbouring parks.



PROTOCOLS FOR COMMON AREAS Physical distancing in common areas, including hallways, can be difficult, particularly in schools that are over capacity. All staff and students need to maintain physical distance, use the exterior doors closest to their classrooms, consistently wear a mask in common areas and avoid congregating to the greatest extent possible



PROTOCOLS FOR STAFF ROOMS All staff should continue following health and safety protocols in staff rooms. This includes wearing masks, maintaining physical distance from colleagues, limiting capacity in the staff room and washrooms, not sharing utensils or dishes and wiping down appliances after use (kettle, fridge handle, microwave, etc.).



PROTOCOLS FOR PARENTS AND VISITORS Schools should limit visitors as much as possible. When visitors must attend the site, schools should clearly communicate protocols for visitors and ensure that appropriate sign-in procedures are always followed (including for all itinerant staff). Schools should also encourage the wearing of masks (consistent with provincial guidelines) by anyone on school sites and prohibit congregating on school grounds.



CLEANING SCHEDULES The reviews identified that cleaning schedules could be more carefully considered. For example, cleaning occurs throughout the day and students are asked to evacuate the classrooms periodically throughout the day so cleaning staff can disinfect the classroom. This movement requires students to be in the hallway where they are in close proximity to each other while the classroom is disinfected. A balance needs to be struck between cleaning activities and overall attempts to maximize physical distancing.

NEXT STEPS

The Surrey School District is committed to continuous learning. Each of these environmental assessments, as well as our district's ongoing work, has and will continue to inform our practice. This ongoing work includes:

- Review and discussions at each site/school-based Health and Safety committee, as well as the district's joint committee, which includes staff and key district partners.
- A comprehensive communications plan to share exposures and reiterate health and safety messaging.

- Regular meetings with Fraser Health to review current status, communications, and the steps we are taking to monitor the levels of exposures in our schools.
- Development of early intervention teams to examine how we can take proactive measures beyond our daily health and safety protocols.

Working to keep our schools safe and ensuring we are doing all we can to stop the spread of COVID-19 is now part of our daily routine.