

August 18, 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Community Members,

I hope you are all having a wonderful summer and enjoying the warm weather we've had for most of July and August! It's been a nice time to enjoy the outdoors and God's marvelous creation around us. This is the first of what is likely to be several updates regarding our 2020-21 school year, as there are many questions from parents and staff at this time. We have been working hard to obtain and understand the most accurate information available so that we can give appropriate answers and help ease any concerns or confusion about our return to school.

We understand that many are concerned about the return to school plan and what it will look like for our students, staff, and parents. We have been working through understanding all of the guidelines and regulations and determining how those apply to our specific school site. The government has said we will return in scenario 1, which is "near normal". I cannot stress enough how much we are working to maintain the normal in our safety plans.

We do ask for your patience, as some of the finer details of the re-entry plan won't be finalized until all the staff return together to the school on August 31st and September 1st. Please be aware that things can change as government decisions change over the weeks. We will have to be flexible and understanding in adjusting to any rules or regulations that come out as things change. Rest assured that all staff will work with the students on the first few days of school to explain any new procedures and routines that will be in place to keep everyone safe and help things run smoothly. **Our number one goal as a staff is for school to be safe and to remain a fun and positive place that students look forward to coming to everyday.** At our June year-end staff meeting, we all agreed that once the new routines are learned we are confident that school will be an enjoyable place that students feel comfortable and happy to be in.

As we work towards a fun and positive atmosphere, please know that there will be inevitable adjustments and glitches to work out in the first few weeks of school. We ask that you remain positive and supportive of our students and staff so we can find solutions together and not focus on what's going wrong. If there are concerns or problems identified, we simply ask for parents or students to bring the questions forward and allow us to find creative solutions to address either a safety issue or a comfort issue. We truly believe that as a staff we can have a great year, even with some things being different.

I would like to address some common questions that we're hearing (or asking ourselves) and will continue to provide information as we learn more. The following is simply compliance with Alberta Education guidelines or restrictions:

- Masks are mandatory for grade 4-9 students at NPCCS in common areas such as hallways. They are not mandatory when students are seated in classrooms and physical distancing is possible. I've been in each of the classrooms with a measuring tape and most of our classrooms have enough space (or small enough student numbers) that proper physical distancing is possible. However, if students are moving around or working in close proximity and facing each other

for their activities, masks will be required for those periods of time. I understand that not everyone likes wearing masks and that some find them uncomfortable, but the intent is to reduce the spread of respiratory particles. Certainly, we do have students that enjoy group work and prefer moving around while learning and would prefer a mask with some freedom of mobility to no mask and sitting in one spot all day. Please know the teachers will work to find a balance of 'mask on' and 'mask off' time. Their goal is to provide high quality, engaging lessons that maximize learning and student engagement. Once students get used to wearing the masks in certain situations, it should become second nature (much like putting on and wearing a seatbelt in the car).

- While staff are required to wear masks, they can remove the mask in the classroom when they are able to have proper distancing from students. There will be times when masks are off for the teacher while they present a lesson at the front of the room, then times where they wear masks to get close to students to provide extra help or support.
- Parents are required to wear masks in the common areas of the school, such as the entrance, foyer, and hallways. In order to keep things safe and simple, we're going to ask that when parents come to drop off or pick up their child, or bring an item to the school, that they come to the office and check in with Mrs. Fisher and/or Mr. Seatter. Once the adult is identified, (Mrs. Fisher seems to know everyone!), we will call the child to the office and everyone can continue on as normal. Being a small community where staff generally know everyone, we are confident that we will have no issues implementing our school visitor policies, even with masks on.
 - If parents don't have a mask or don't want to wear one, we can use phone calls to make arrangements for drop off or pick up outside the building.
- K-3 students are not required to wear masks. If the parents of a K-3 student want them to wear a mask, that's perfectly fine and acceptable. For centres where K-3 students typically participate in an activity facing each other, instead of masks teachers will modify the activity so students are facing the same direction. Another potential option is getting some small plexiglass stands to go between the students. This allows them to continue engaging in typical fun activities while continuing to see each other. Again, this hasn't been determined, but it's being considered as a potentially viable solution.
- Some people are concerned about their child having to be tested for COVID if they have any symptoms. This is partially true, partially misunderstood. If a child has any of the symptoms (which are often quite similar to the common cold), it is true they are not allowed to attend school and would be required to be picked up from school if symptoms develop during the school day. At that point, the child would stay home until the symptoms clear or 10 days, whichever is **longer**. The alternative to potentially return sooner is to get a COVID test at the Health Unit and produce a negative test. Once the negative result is confirmed **and symptoms clear**, the child is allowed to return to the school. This can certainly be inconvenient, but it is the law in Alberta and we will need to make adjustments during these times.

- This undoubtedly means some students are going to miss some school days during the school year as colds are common in winter. If students are required to stay home while waiting to be cleared to return, teachers will compile assignments and work for students to either keep up at home or catch up when they return to school. This is quite similar to how student assignments were handled in the past if they missed any school due to illness or vacation.
- Students will continue to have recess. Pembina Hills is still confirming what will happen with playground equipment, but we want students to have enjoyable breaks outdoors, playing with their friends.
 - K-3 students will have recess together as will 4-6. At NPCS, we already have designated areas for these grade levels so things don't appear to be different (at this point). Although there is some overlap among a few students between the K-3 and 4-6 age groups, it's fairly minimal overlap and in a wide-open area so it should be fairly typical. We don't want recess to feel rigid or restricted at NPCS - we want it to be fun and safe.
 - Lockers will be staggered (e.g. K123, K123, K123...) so that students in each grade can go to their locker at the same time and have some spacing between them. The recess exit and entry of the school will be slightly staggered, but overall the time outdoors will be common times for either K-3 or 4-6. This will take a bit of practice at the beginning of the year, but once students and staff get used to it, it'll become normal and easy to do.
- Jr. High students will continue to have recess breaks together and will be considered a cohort as our Jr. High is not a large group (unlike a city school). This allows us to have Options and CTF courses as we did in the past.
- With some simple safety protocols and the Options/CTF courses being at the end of the day, we're able to have normal classes for Jr. High to keep it enjoyable and remain safe. Depending on the type of course, different teachers will implement different procedures and routines to ensure their class allows for full participation while keeping safety in the forefront.
- At this point it appears Jr. High students will be able to have intramurals and play in the gym. The Pembina Hills Phys Ed committee and Administrators group will be meeting early in the school year to develop plans for leagues to happen within the Alberta Education Guidelines.
 - We may focus more on games that naturally allow for distancing until we receive more clarity on games such as basketball. If you know me, basketball is by far my favorite sport and it's tough to think of not doing it the way we normally would. However, I understand why and will work with Pembina Hills and Alberta Ed to ensure student safety.

I understand that there are many questions that likely haven't been answered in this update. Please feel free to email your questions to brett.seatter@pembinahills.ca. As I get questions, I'll either respond to them right away or send out the info to all parents, depending on the type of question. Please remember I'm simply following the rules, procedures and laws of our province and Pembina Hills School Division. Also,

remember that there is a wide range of perspectives concerning COVID. Some aren't too concerned, and others have underlying health issues that put them at an increased risk. I've heard from both, and I'm aware of the need to develop creative solutions that ensure everyone is happy and safe. I commit to all parents and students to work collaboratively through these issues so that parents can be comfortable sending their children to our school and having a positive school year.

I believe God will grant us the patience and the wisdom to work through this together. Common sense, cooperation, and positivity will go a long ways as we make this a memorable school year.

Sincerely,

Mr. Brett Seatter
Principal of NPCS