

April 3, 2020

Superintendent's Weekly Message

Dear students, parents and guardians,

I hope this message finds you safe and healthy, and I offer you our continued best wishes and support. We continue to abide by the directive and advice of the Provincial Health Officer and the Ministry of Education, meaning that schools remain “shuttered” with access only for maintenance and cleaning purposes, retrieval of essential items and soon services for children of front-line essential service workers. I want to thank you for your continued understanding and patience as we redesign our operations to support learning and to support families in new and non-traditional ways.

Teachers have been reaching out to students and parents this week to reconnect and to explore what learning might look like in the future, and it is clear that there is a wide range of student need and family readiness to support learning at home. A lot of consideration is going into how we address issues of equity, accessibility and capacity while balancing health and safety concerns and recommended best practices such as isolation and physical distancing. We know that access to technology is an issue for many families and in remote communities, so we are trying to provide learning opportunities that are not solely dependent on technology. We're also very mindful that there appears to be no return to in-class instruction on the immediate horizon, so we are thoughtfully looking at systems, structures and routines that anticipate a lengthier absence from school.

Next week we will continue in our outreach to families to create these new routines. We will do what we can to engage in ways that make the most sense to families given their home circumstances. We will be making particular efforts to provide supports to families whose life circumstances create challenges for establishing routines for learning and connection, as well as working with parents of children with unique needs to see how to best support those children.

Educationally, our main goal is to ensure students are on-track to successfully transition to the next grade and to graduate on time. At secondary schools, this means being clear about which students aren't currently on-track and addressing their needs, and about being intentional and selective as to what ongoing learning needs to occur to ensure students stay on-track through the end of this school year. We are not issuing formal Term 3 report cards at secondary and instead have asked teachers to take a snapshot of student performance as of Spring Break and to use this information to guide what further demonstrations of learning are required. That will include deeming work done in some electives to be sufficient for final grading earlier than June. Parents of grade 12 students, please remember that every student who was on track to graduate this year will complete grade 12 and that we will do everything in our power to support successful transition to post-high school plans, including post-secondary. Considerable work is being done with Post-Secondary Education partners both provincially and nationally to support that objective.

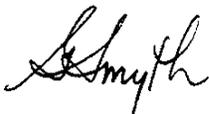
At elementary schools, we are asking teachers to develop thoughtful, purposeful home learning activities that emphasize literacy, numeracy, social/emotional learning and core competencies and that aren't dependent on technology or large quantities of print materials. We also need to stress that it's not going to be about curriculum, instruction, assessment and reporting as usual. We will, however, try to give children opportunities to demonstrate learning in ways that can extend what teachers already know about their learners and will support successful transitions to the next grade.

Many parents have questions or concerns beyond continuity of learning such as care for children of Essential Service Workers, the status of school meal programs and support for more vulnerable members of our school communities. Information for Essential Service Workers is posted to the SD70 website, and conversations are ongoing with school meal providers about the logistics of continuing lunch program services in Port Alberni, Tofino and Ucluelet. More information on school lunch program services will be communicated to you in the upcoming days.

We are also receiving requests from students and parents to collect materials and personal belongings from schools. We are currently developing and testing a process to reunite students with items in their lockers or classrooms and should see it begin to roll out on a larger scale in the weeks ahead. This is not to suggest the school year is over but rather a way to connect students with personal items, learning materials, resources and items necessary to support learning at home. When ready, individual schools will contact parents about the process by which students can safely, securely collect belongings according to a predetermined schedule.

Finally, our goal is to be fully up and running in the new reality by the middle of April. Please continue to monitor the SD70 website at www.sd70.bc.ca for information and updates from both the school district and the Ministry of Education. I'll be in touch again next week.

As always, stay safe and healthy, practice good hygiene and proper respiratory etiquette, and when you get the chance express your gratitude to those essential service workers keeping our communities going.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Smyth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Greg Smyth
Superintendent of Schools