



STA Connection September 3, 2020



Welcome back to a new school year, and a September like no other. As you know things have changed since June as a result of the decision of the Ministry of Education to open schools in Stage 2 of the pandemic response, and to change Stage 2 to require 100% attendance at school by students. Since this was announced on July 29, leaders in the BCTF and the STA have been advocating for a reduced density of students returning, because with 100% return, all-important physical distancing is impossible. We know

teachers have been closely following the rapidly changing events, and we know that recent changes to the opening plan are as a result of parent and teacher pressure.

Timetables, Blended Transition, and Consultation

Earlier in August the schedule for Secondary schools was announced, and this week a change to elementary and Grades 8 and 9 was announced, which includes an option for parents to choose a more gradual return to school for their child(ren), called a blended transition program. It is still not known how many parents will opt for this. We were able to meet with Senior Administration in the district to raise concerns and flag potential issues, but the STA wasn't asked sign off on any of the plans nor did we have extensive consultation. We have been advocating strongly on various points, especially for the health and safety of teachers, and keeping our eyes on how these quick changes to schools' practices might impact our collective agreement rights. There are a lot of moving parts!

STA members respond to our survey!

We created a COVID-19 summer survey, and more than 2700 members (almost half of our membership) responded, which is an astonishing rate of return in the summer. The response rate and the survey results (over 500 pages of long form answers) told us that teachers are paying close attention to the pandemic and its impact on schools and the risks that exist for us all when we return to class. We used results from the survey to pressure leaders to have a special school return plan in Surrey, pointing out that our schools are crowded, and the virus is more prevalent in the Fraser Health region. We met with Senior administration several times, with the six NDP MLAs from Surrey, and we requested a meeting with the school board. We hope to meet again soon with the MLAs to keep the reality of Surrey teachers and students top of mind.

One finding that really concerned us is that at the time of responding, 80% of respondents felt "anxious" or "very anxious" about the return to schools. This tells us that on top of our advocacy for improvements, all of us need to take the time to express support for each other heading into the school year. There is no better support for a teacher than another teacher! Everyone is experiencing unanticipated changes to their work routines and for some members this may be traumatic. Kindness and patience go a long way to reducing anxiety.

"Blended transition" model staffing process

Principals will be receiving information about the parent demand for this program and reorganizing schools to the extent required. Our position is that class size and composition limits apply to the elementary blended learning groups. This is an issue still being discussed with HR and senior management. What we believe will happen is that the blended transition groups will mostly be assigned at each school from the staff at that school. In small schools or where there is low demand for the blended transition model, there may be some groups that draw from more than one school.

Staff committees should pay attention to the staffing process for the blended transition model, advocating for transparency in how teaching assignments are made. Please contact us if the process seems problematic.

Health and Safety Update



With the implementation of stage 2 for the fall term of 2020, there are many new health and safety protocols to address the covid pandemic. Here are some of the highlights, as of Sept. 1st:

Training

Your school's joint health and safety committee will be attending a half day of training on September 3rd, 2020. They will then be presenting a training session to the staff of your school on September 8th and 9th. Students are not attending on those two days, and then are only attending for an hour each day on September 10th and 11th. Principals have been asked to ensure that those teachers who were not present for the training are given sufficient time to review the training documents on September 10th and 11th.

Physical Distancing

A physical distance of 2m is to be maintained between everyone where possible. Physical Distancing of 2m from each other is not required of staff and students within a cohort. Cohorts are 60 people in elementary and 120 in secondary, though the District is considering secondary cohorts to be 30 people in any given quarter.

Staff Meetings

Large gatherings at schools, including staff meetings, should be held virtually where possible. This is important, as the virus is primarily passed between adults. If an administrator insists a meeting should be in person, please contact us for support.

Cleaning

Elementary schools will be disinfected once per day, secondary schools twice per day. High touch surfaces will be cleaned an additional time each day.

Refusal of Unsafe Work

If you feel that you are being asked to do work that is unsafe, you have the right to refuse. The first step is to tell your immediate supervisor. They may be able to take steps that result in you now feeling the work is safe. If not, the next step is for the supervisor to investigate and take steps involving a worker member of the school's health and safety committee. If they are unable to make changes that result in you feeling the work is safe, the next step is to bring in a Prevention Officer from WorksafeBC. Please contact the STA if you have refused unsafe work so that we can support you.

PPE

Masks are required to be worn in high traffic areas by staff in elementary schools and by staff and students in secondary schools. Where physical distancing of 2 metres is not possible when interacting outside your cohort, masks are required of all staff, both elementary and secondary, and secondary students.

Masks work best when worn consistently and by as many people as possible, because they don't protect the wearers from the virus; rather, the wearers don't unwittingly spread virus as easily while wearing one. We have STA branded reusable masks and face shields coming in, and want to distribute them to members. Staff reps, please check your emails for instructions, and TTOCs, we will be arranging a plan for distribution to you, please stay tuned to your TTOC rep's email.

Creating a 2-metre Buffer

Teachers are encouraged to use materials at their school, such as tables, to create a space of 2m from their students where physical distancing is required. It is also important to have this space for teachers from outside the cohort (e.g. TTOCs, Core Music and French at elementary, etc.) who will be working with your students. Teachers who choose to obtain their own barriers are permitted to bring them in, but can also ask for an assessment from Nancy Johnston, Health and Safety Officer, Human Resources Department, to determine whether such a barrier would be provided by the employer.

COVID-19-Related Accommodations

As you may know, because of the serious threat the pandemic poses to health, the STA has been advocating for months for members with pre-existing health conditions or family members who are immunocompromised to have accommodations to work remotely from home. Many of these requests were unofficially permitted in June, given how few students were attending school. However, HR has approved very few, if any, requests to work remotely from home for September, due to the Ministry's directive that all students must return to schools in the fall, as this directly affects the operational needs at each site. The advent of the blended transition model could create some opportunities for accommodations, but please note that it does still require working face-to-face with students. The District is not currently envisioning having teachers work from home. Given how new this program is, we are still discussing with HR how it could affect accommodations.

We understand that receiving a letter of non-approval is upsetting. HR has permitted the use of sick days to cover absences for those members who are concerned with attending the school site during this pandemic, and they have also approved unpaid leaves without penalty for the duration of this school year, to June 2021. These are adjustments that may make a difference for some members, but will not work for everyone. If your request for an accommodation to work remotely from home has not been approved, please email us at sta@surreyteachers.org with details, as the BCTF is collecting this data to advocate for members at the Ministry level.

This is the process to request a Covid19-related accommodation:

1. Fill out the COVID19-RELATED ACCOMMODATION REQUEST form – located on the surreyschools.ca website – sign in and search 'health services Covid19 page'.
2. HR requires your physician to support this request by completing the DISTRICT MEDICAL CERTIFICATE-ACCOMMODATION form and submitting to Health Services. Remember to keep a copy of this form for your own records.
3. If Health Services requires further information, they will contact you directly.
4. You will receive an email response to your accommodation request.
5. If your request is NOT approved, please email us at sta@surreyteacher.org.

Summer work by your union leaders and colleagues

Advocacy takes work and we would like to thank

- The 25 teachers from across the province providing advice to the working groups at the Ministry
- Elementary and Secondary teachers who met with senior management regarding the September plans
- Our 6 Local Reps to the BCTF who attended a Special Representative Assembly August 28th
- Various Surrey teachers who attended the BCTF Summer Conference
- Our executive for meeting over the summer twice to consider actions and ideas
- Table officers, particularly Matt our president, who had very few summer holiday days.

Professional Development Opportunities

The BCTF and Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) are providing virtual options for workshops and conferences to continue providing professional development opportunities for members.

The BCTF offers several online versions of their workshops that can be booked for your school through the BCTF website here: <https://bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx>.

Many PSAs have already planned their conferences for the PSA day on October 23rd. More information about PSAs can be found here: <https://bctf.ca/PSAs.aspx>. Registration is open for many of these conferences. For example, the Environmental Educators Provincial Specialist Association's (EPPSA) annual C2C conference registration can be found here: <https://c2c.ourconference.ca/>. You do not need to be member of the PSA to attend and the registration fee often includes the membership fee.

PD Rep Training

Please watch for an update on our virtual PD Rep training dates coming out soon. If you are the PD rep this year and have not already done so, please email Stacy at repsupport@surreyteachers.org with your contact information so that she can ensure that you are included on our communications list.

Staff Rep Elections



Elections of school union representatives, including staff rep, Health & Safety rep, Pro-D rep, and Social Justice rep are held at the first staff meeting of the school year. The STA Policies and Procedures state:

5.G.10 THAT the STARA representatives and alternates shall be elected no later than the first staff meeting of the new school year and prior to the orientation workshop.

With staff meetings likely occurring online, this year's STA rep elections may look different than in previous years. A process you may wish to follow is to first establish and communicate the protocol for the vote. It is not required that the vote be held anonymously but you may choose to. Teams has an add on called Polly that allows for anonymous voting in the settings. Otherwise, a vote with a show of hands in a

STA Food Bank Donation



Unions help fight poverty in our community!

In the General Meeting held in June teachers voted to purchase \$12K worth of protein to donate to the Surrey Food Bank. The delivery has finally taken place, and we are so pleased to be able to support our community in this way. Thanks to the [Union Protein Project](#) for facilitating this important work, as there is so much need during the pandemic.

Julia MacRae, first VP, Kevin Amboe, Professional Services Support officer, and Annie Ohana, LR and STA Exec member, deliver the tuna and a cheque for \$1000 to the Surrey Food Bank, Sept 3, 2020.