

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

May 7, 2020

TO ALL EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

Let me begin by thanking you, once again, for the ongoing flexibility and adaptability that you have shown under the current circumstances. In keeping with my practice since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would like to provide you with the most recent information regarding the return to school.

Postponement of the opening of certain preschools and elementary schools

As announced earlier today by Premier François Legault, considering the epidemiological situation and the recommendations made by the Direction de la Santé publique, the opening of preschools and elementary schools located within the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (Montréal metropolitan community), as well as those located within the MRC de Joliette, has been postponed to May 25, 2020, the health situation permitting. Please notify your teams and parents as soon as possible.

Evaluation of learning

Following discussions with education stakeholders, I intend to propose an amendment to the *Basic school regulation* that allows for some flexibility in the evaluation of learning in general education in the youth sector. This proposed amendment will take into account the exceptional circumstances we have been experiencing this year and will be based primarily on the professional judgment of teachers.

Under this proposal, a final report card will be issued to each student by July 10 and will include the final marks for the first two terms as well as a mention of *Pass*, *Fail* or *Not evaluated* for the third term.

To determine the final mark for the year, teachers will take into consideration the first two terms, the evaluations carried out from the beginning of the third term until March 13, and their evaluation of the progress students have made from March 13 until the end of the school year. Based on this, teachers will then give students a *Pass* or a *Fail* mark. However, for the Secondary IV and Secondary V report cards, the final marks will be given as percentages.

With regard to preschool education, given that the third term report card constitutes an overall assessment, the following statements could be used: *The student meets the program expectations* or *The student does not meet the program expectations*.

More information on this proposal will be sent to you shortly.

Intensive English as a Second Language (ESL)

The closure of schools poses an additional challenge for many Elementary Cycle Three (Elementary 5 and 6) students in Intensive ESL classes. As you know, in many schools offering Intensive ESL, English as a Second Language is taught for five consecutive months while other academic subjects are taught during the other five months (5 month/5 month model). As a result, many students in Intensive ESL are currently in a situation in which they have acquired very little learning in subjects other than Intensive ESL.

School service centres must take the necessary steps to ensure that these students are able to maximize their learning by the end of the school year. The evaluation of their learning will be carried out under the same terms and conditions as those for other students, subject to the government's approval of these terms and conditions.

Intensive ESL students will be provided with additional pedagogical support from the start of the 2020-2021 year to ensure that they have made the necessary progress to continue their learning.

Distance learning at the secondary level

I would like to remind you of certain points and provide further information about continued learning at the secondary level. First of all, as you know, although secondary schools remain closed, this does not mean that the school year has ended. Teaching and learning must continue from a distance.

As mentioned in previous letters, secondary students will be provided with improved pedagogical support. While this support can take many forms, such as classes held online or by phone, and on various platforms, depending on each school's situation, it must nevertheless be based on certain common denominators.

First of all, the support must be aimed at maintaining previously acquired learning while promoting the ongoing learning of essential knowledge. Teachers must provide a weekly plan to enable students to create a schedule and work plan.

There should be frequent, if not daily, contact between teachers and students and increased availability on the part of teaching staff to respond to any questions students or parents may have.

In addition, to provide optimum support to at-risk students, it is requested that non-teaching professionals be more available and that individual online meetings between at-risk students and the professionals concerned be held.

Lastly, no matter what form the support takes, it is essential that school team members carry out a personalized weekly follow-up with each student by phone, with a more intensified focus on at-risk students. Indeed, despite the numerous advantages technology has to offer, it cannot provide the comfort and encouragement of a direct relationship between teacher and student, the helping hand of a staff member who supports students in overcoming confinement-related stress, or the support of a professional who knows how to guide and aid a young person in distress.

I am aware that distance learning at the secondary level includes its own set of challenges for some staff members. I wish to remind you that those who so desire will now have free access to the distance learning training provided by TÉLUQ, at <https://jenseigneadistance.teluq.ca>.

Moreover, in order to facilitate the sharing of digital resources among teachers, a new *Teachers* section has been created on the Open School website. It provides various resources for initiating distance learning and for communicating, collaborating, teaching, networking and exchanging with peers. In addition, resource persons from RÉCIT (there are more than 200!) will also be available to provide teachers with support and professional development.

Lastly, using existing budget rules, additional funding has been approved to provide schools with the necessary technological equipment for distance learning.

Purchase of face masks

As I announced in my previous letter, MEES will authorize the purchase of face masks for school personnel. Under a special budget rule, school service centres will be able to purchase reusable face masks for staff members who request them.

A list of suppliers will be made available on Collecto as of today. School service centres who wish to do so may also purchase the face masks from local suppliers.

Working toward a successful return to school

Now, more than ever, the coming days will be crucial for ensuring that thousands of students throughout Québec can successfully return to school on a gradual and voluntary basis. I would like to thank you most sincerely for the commitment you have shown and continue to show, despite the difficult situation we are all facing. In only a few weeks, we will have completed a collective task that, under normal circumstances, would have taken months or even years of preparation. Our students are very fortunate to be able to count on the support of such dedicated individuals. You are amazing!

Yours truly,

Jean-François Roberge
Minister of Education and Higher Education