



Commission scolaire English-Montréal

English Montreal School Board

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

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COMMUNIQUÉ

Monday, May 4, 2020

Update on Planned Reopening of Elementary Schools

To all members of the EMSB Community,

This weekend was mostly warm and sunny, and I hope that you have had an opportunity to re-energize your minds and hearts – inspired by spring and the re-birth in nature, after what was a very difficult week for all concerned.

I write today to answer three key questions and to share some other important information that parents and staff should know as we begin this week.

1) What is the EMSB's position on the reopening of Elementary schools?

The EMSB is in favour of reopening its Elementary schools when it is safe to do so.

The EMSB will continue to work towards the reopening of our Elementary schools. We will aim for May 19, but we will take the time needed to plan carefully.

Most importantly, the EMSB wants its parents, staff, students and community to be assured that the board's first priority is the health and safety of our students and staff.

It is very important to state that the EMSB has great respect for, and every confidence in Santé Publique. And we will follow all of their health and safety guidelines.

See: <https://santemontreal.qc.ca/en/public/coronavirus-covid-19/>

As of yesterday, this government site indicates that there are 14,599 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Montreal area. A quick calculation seems to reveal that close to 80 percent of all confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Montreal area are registered on the territory of the EMSB. And the rate of increase in some areas of the EMSB territory, including but not limited to Montreal North, continue to increase at an alarming rate.

These facts contribute to the EMSB proceeding with caution.

2) How will reopened Elementary schools function?

ALL PARAMETERS OUTLINED BELOW ARE BASED ON INSTRUCTIONS THAT SCHOOL BOARDS HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SANTÉ PUBLIQUE.

In Classrooms

The classrooms will be organized into several, two metre by two metre “personal spaces” for the children and the teacher. A “corridor” to be able to enter and exit those personal spaces will be designated to ensure social distancing at all times.

No more than 15 children will be permitted in any classroom. But in some classrooms proper spacing may result in there only being adequate space for eight to 10 children.

If a classroom cannot accommodate all of the students whose parents choose to send them back to school, some groups will have to be held in other rooms such as the library or science room or other common spaces that would otherwise be closed.

If an elementary school is not able to accommodate all of the groups required to ensure proper social distancing, some groups may have to be relocated to high school buildings.

While an effort will be made to keep a child’s regular setting, it is possible that students will not have their own teacher when classes re-open.

It is also possible that students may be in a group with students who were not previously in their class. Some students may also be placed in multi-age groupings.

Physical education and specialist classes will not take place. This would include music, art, drama, etc. Only core subjects will be undertaken.

Whatever the grouping or classroom, students will remain in their assigned classroom and their reserved “personal space” for the duration of the day – including lunch and quite likely during after-school daycare (if enrolled).

Students should normally not share classroom material (books, math manipulatives, crayons, etc.), personal materials (hand sanitizer, food, etc.) or recreation equipment (toys, games, etc.). But when items are shared, they will be disinfected.

Hand washing will be required upon entry into the school, before and after eating and before and after going outside at recess or lunch. While schools will have some supplies, students may choose to bring their own hand sanitizer, etc.

Parents and visitors will not be allowed into the school building – again, to minimize the number of interactions.

All Santé Publique safety, hygiene and cleaning guidelines to ensure student and staff safety will be strictly adhered to.

Students with an IEP

In the period leading up to the reopening of elementary schools, teachers and school multi-disciplinary teams will review the IEPs to determine how best to accommodate for the students with special needs within these new organizational parameters set out by the MEES and Santé Publique.

Some students, especially those with severe special needs, may find social distancing requirement and the more restrictive learning environment particularly challenging.

Staff working with students with severe special needs who are not able to understand and follow the required health and safety guidelines including social distancing, will wear some protective gear. Details to follow.

Lunch and Recess

Students must bring their own lunch and snack(s) from home. Students will not be permitted to share food. Microwaves will not be available.

Water fountains will be off limits. Students should bring their own bottle(s) of water.

Students will eat at their desk.

The Principal will create a staggered recess schedule allowing class groups to go outside. When outside, class groups will remain separated from other groups – meaning students will not be able to spend recess with children from other groups. Social distancing within their own groups will also be maintained.

Play structures and swings, etc. will be off limits.

Technology needs

- Surveys and more information will follow this week.

Collecting your child's belongings at school

This process must be undertaken carefully and while ensuring the Santé Publique requirements. If not already done, Principals will be contacting parents early this week to set up appointment times – both at the high school and elementary levels.

Transportation on School Buses

Santé Publique requires that every child be seated alone on a bus bench and that there be a vacant bench between him / her and the next child. Siblings who live in the same house however, may share a bench.

At the elementary level, a school bus is considered at full capacity when there are 72 children on the bus (three per seat). Most EMSB buses normally have closer to 48 children per bus (two per seat). The Santé Publique requirements in effect reduce bus capacity to 12 children.

Given this limited number of seats on each bus, and given the limited number of bus drivers available (as many are over the age of 60), parents who send their child back when schools re-open will be surveyed and asked if they would be able to DRIVE THEIR CHILD to school such that priority may be given to parents who do not have cars or anyone to drive their child to school.

- Surveys and more information will follow.

IMPORTANT NOTE TO PARENTS

Every parent is eager for life to return to normal – for themselves, but even more so for their children. But it must be understood that the circumstances under which our schools will re-open this spring will NOT be normal. Moreover, the teaching and learning environments in our schools, given the required health protocols, may not be considered ideal by some parents.

The teachers and staff will do their best in the circumstances – of that I have no doubt. But many of the classroom strategies such as learning centres, guided reading, peer support, group work and other hands-on / experiential pedagogical methods will not meet safety guidelines. And this reality will be difficult for both the Teachers and the students.

It is important that all parents understand and accept this reality when making their decision to send their child back to school or not.

Returning to school this spring is OPTIONAL. It is a choice that the parents will make. The EMSB seeks not to discourage parents from sending their child back to school. We do however want to ensure that parents make an informed decision.

- Surveys and more information will follow.

3) What to expect this week?

While it has not yet been determined, the EMSB will use Tuesday, May 19 as its **tentative** target date for the re-opening of elementary schools. When a firm date is decided, everyone will be informed. As we prepare, you can expect the following (not an exhaustive list) to take place this week:

Parents:

- ✓ will be surveyed about whether their child will return to school when schools re-open;
- ✓ whose child took the school bus prior to the closure will be surveyed about transportation needs;
- ✓ will be surveyed about their technology needs;
- ✓ will be invited by their Principal to schedule a time to collect their child's belongings from the school (Elementary and High school).

Teachers and Staff:

- ✓ will be invited by their Principal to schedule a time to collect their belongings and pedagogical materials (elementary and high school);
- ✓ may be required by their Principal to come to school to help with the process by which parents will collect their child's belongings;
- ✓ will continue their teaching at a distance and making connections with their students – especially those with special needs;
- ✓ will prepare for the deployment of any technology needed by students based on guidelines and survey results;
- ✓ will take part in any other tasks required by their Principal or the Board.

Caretaking Staff:

- ✓ will return to school to ensure proper disinfection and cleaning;
- ✓ make arrangements for the emptying of lockers / cubbies following parents picking up their child's belongings;
- ✓ at the request of their Principal, will begin to set up the Elementary classrooms according to required social distancing guidelines;
- ✓ in the elementary schools, will make preparations for two by two meter 'student spaces';
- ✓ will take part in any other tasks required by the Principal or the Board.

I hope this communiqué helps to answer some questions. More information will be forthcoming. Until Then ... Keep Safe and Be Well!

