

Return to School Framework

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Introduction

Returning to school in the fall is an exciting and stressful time for students, teachers and parents. This year will be full of additional challenges for everyone involved, but with good consultation, planning, and a little bit of creativity, we believe the 20/21 school year on PEI can be safe, successful, and fun!

CPHO guidelines should, and must, be followed in September and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The safety of our students, staff, and their families is critically important to all of us. Although this 'new normal' poses great challenges, it also comes with opportunities to improve our education system and provide not only a 'new normal' but a better normal for our students.

Priorities for Return to School

The current *Welcome Back to School Plan* released by the government, unfortunately, does not outline any priority areas for schools to consider when developing their detailed return to school plans. We have identified two priorities we would like to see as part of any future return to school planning.

As the Official Opposition on PEI, we would like to encourage government to prioritize **mental health and social well-being** of all students, teachers, and parents. This may mean the curriculum will not only need to be flexible this coming year, but that our students are also welcomed back to a school environment that is safe and supportive. We have advocated for increased counsellors in schools, and will continue to do so. We are also advocating for classroom resources that would allow all students the opportunity to learn coping strategies and emotion regulation.

One area where curriculum and academic supports should be prioritized is with **students who are struggling**. This includes students with disabilities, EAL students, or students who were falling, or have fallen, behind academically. These students should be given the opportunity and resources to strengthen their academic skills while maintaining their ability to be social with their friends.

Developing Detailed Individual School Plans

More Information is Required from Government

Before we ask each school to develop their own return to school plans we must ensure the Department of Education has given them the information and direction they require. We believe the current *Welcome Back to School Plan* has omitted some details to help direct and guide schools in the detailed planning.

The following list outlines some of the details we believe should be determined at a provincial level prior to asking schools to create their individual return to school plans. These details, and any others identified by schools, should be answered **immediately**.

Considering we are not sure what will happen in September, we must also be preparing for three realities:

1. a full return;
2. a partial return; and
3. home learning.

These will all require consultation and, therefore, must be acted upon immediately. For this to be successful, there is a need to be efficient and to release, at least some detailed information must be released well in advance before the beginning of the school year.

Details that should be included in the Government's *Welcome Back to School Plan*

Buses

- Will there be a maximum number of students permitted on each bus?
- How will the number of students who require bus transportation be determined? Please provide these numbers to each school.
- Will any students be turned down for busing?
- Can parents drive sometimes and not others? Will the bus stop at every stop every morning?
- If social distancing is to be enforced, bus drivers may not be capable of monitoring movement safely while driving. Will busing assistants be provided? Can additional staff be requested by any school?

Inside of the classroom

- Will there be a maximum number of students in a classroom? Will the size of the classroom affect this number?
- Will physical distancing (6 feet) be enforced inside of the cohorts at all times? Please provide details.

Supports

- Will additional EA's/EAL/assistants be hired? Can additional staff be requested by any school?
- Will additional counselors be hired? Can additional staff be requested by any school?

Non-homeroom (gym, library, music, etc.)

- Will any physical space be protected from being repurposed as classrooms (gym, library, art rooms, etc)?
- Will sharing gym equipment, books, instruments (non wind) be permitted?

Field trips

- Will field trips be encouraged or discouraged? Please provide justification including benefit and risk.

Recess

- Will physical distancing (6 feet) be enforced during outdoor time?
- What distance must be maintained between cohorts outdoors?
- Will any additional recess or outdoor time be mandated?

Physical distancing

- Should students be disciplined for not following physical distancing rules? Why or why not? If yes, please provide details on what this discipline should be.

Hygiene/cleaning

- Will additional cleaning staff be hired? Can additional staff be requested by any school?

After school Programs

- Will after school programs be allowed to continue even though cohorts will be broken. If after school programs are not running as usual please provide details on additional childcare plans for families who use these programs.

Metrics

- What metrics will be used to determine if and when some aspects of schooling on PEI must adapt (ex. What would necessitate some in-class learning to be moved to home learning?).
- Please provide details on what aspects of the school plan would be affected first if the COVID-19 situation on PEI should change.

Home learning (Partial or full)

- Please provide a list of potential technology, professional development opportunities and other resources that will or could be made available to teachers to improve their ability to teach remotely.
- Please provide details on all consultations done outside of the education system (with communities, care centres, etc.) and what resources may be available in the event that students can not attend school.
- Will teachers be considered essential workers in the event of a full or partial school closure so that they may qualify for childcare or elder care?

Developing an Effective and Efficient Individual School Plan

The Official Opposition believes strongly in **transparency and accountability**. For this reason, we encourage government to support the development of individual return to school plans by releasing details as they are developed for feedback and consultation with teachers, students, and parents.

There are countless approaches that would allow for this to happen. We have outlined one such approach as an example. We encourage government to follow the approach they believe will work for its department and the schools it supports.

Proposed Approach for Development of Individual School Plans

The Official Opposition proposes the following pilot. To begin, the Department of Education should put out a call to Island schools to identify a handful of schools who would be available and interested in preparing a detailed return to school plan for their school in the coming 2 weeks.

The school, represented by principal, admin, teachers, students, and parents would lead the development of the plan based on their day to day knowledge of their school building, students, and school culture.

The department would provide capacity, support, and resources as requested by the school. The department would also determine any additional guidelines required that schools identify as outside of their decision making responsibilities.

Detailed plans for up to six (6) schools would be developed and reported publicly by August 1, 2020. This would allow other schools, students, and parents the opportunity to review the proposed plans and to provide feedback. Feedback could be used to strengthen the plans proposed. Those detailed plans could then be used by other schools to develop their own detailed return to school plan.

The department may also provide schools with direction on a list of details that they would like addressed. This list is not exhaustive but does outline some of the most common concerns the Official Opposition have heard from teachers and parents.

Details that could be included in the Individual School Plan

Buses

- Will your school require additional bus routes (based on information provided to you by the Department of Education)?

Entering school

- Please provide details on drop-off for students who are not being bussed.
- How will traffic flow be controlled (an issue already at some schools)?

Inside of the classroom

- Please describe classroom desk placement?
- What will your school maximum class size be?
- Will any overflow be required (more classrooms are needed)? Where will these classes be put (rooms inside of school/outside of school building)?
- If required by the Department - how will physical distancing be enforced?

Supports

- Can educational support staff move between classes/cohorts?
- Will students be able to leave class for extra help and meet with other students/teachers for this (ex. EAL students leave class to work with an EAL tutor with a small group of EAL students from multiple classrooms).
- Are additional EA's, EAL tutors or other support staff required?
- Are additional counsellors required?

Non-homeroom (gym, library, music)

- Will any physical spaces be protected?
- Please provide details on how non-homeroom classes will be held.

Field trips

- Will field trips be encouraged or discouraged (within the school property and off school property)? Please provide details and justification.

Recess

- Will recess be staggered? Please provide details.
- What distance will be maintained between cohorts? Who will enforce this and how?

Hygiene/cleaning

- What will students be responsible for? Washing/hand sanitizer? Who will provide soap/sanitizer?
- What will teachers be responsible for? During the day, after school? Who will provide cleaning supplies?
- Will disinfectant aerosoles be used?

After school

- Please provide details on pick-up by parents (non-bussed students)?
- After school programs - will they be allowed to continue even though cohorts will be broken. If after school programs are not running as usual what is the plan?

Home learning (partial or full)

- What professional development would be beneficial for teachers and staff to improve their ability to teach remotely?
- What technology and resources are required to improve remote teaching and home learning?
- Please provide details of potential remote learning approaches, techniques or ideas that may be used in the event that schools can not remain fully operational (assume full quarantine is not enforced, but that PEI returns to Phases 2 or 3 of the Renew PEI Plan).

Challenges and Opportunities

The Official Opposition of PEI would like to acknowledge the hard work that teachers, staff, and parents have done over the past few months. This has truly been an unprecedented challenge for all involved in our children's education. The success we have had thus far, and will continue to enjoy, is because of these amazing individuals and their love and dedication to our students.

Unfortunately, the challenges are not all behind us. As we move into a new school year we will face many additional challenges. The Official Opposition believes teachers, staff, and parents are in a unique situation to enact positive change, with the support of government, that will benefit students this coming school year, and for years to come.