

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

May 4, 2020

TO ALL EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

Let me begin by sincerely thanking you for your commitment to our schools over the past week in order to successfully prepare them to reopen in a gradual and safe manner. I am well aware that, as the first students return to classrooms on May 11, your work has never stopped, in spite of the current exceptional circumstances, and I am particularly grateful to you for this.

As has become my habit since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would like to share new information with you today regarding the conditions for reopening schools.

Protective equipment

As mentioned in previous communications, procedural masks will be provided to school personnel working in specialized classes. Masks will also be provided to preschool personnel, since they are more closely interacting with children and the physical distancing rule of 2 metres between individuals is more difficult to follow. Please see the [CNESST Guide](#) for this purpose (available in French only).

The Direction de la santé publique does not currently recommend that masks be provided to all school personnel. However, I am aware that some staff members who are in close contact with students over extended periods may have concerns about this, and that wearing a face mask could be reassuring for them during this crucial time as schools reopen.

In light of the challenges and concerns expressed by our partners, I have decided to allow face masks to be purchased for school staff. A budget rule has been made available for school service centres to enable them to purchase reusable face masks for staff members who request them.

Using professionals as homeroom teachers

As you know, the reopening of schools before the end of the school year will be especially beneficial to students with disabilities, social maladjustments or learning difficulties. These students must be provided with optimum support by school professionals. For this purpose, and in order to avoid, as much as possible, depriving at-risk students of essential services, I ask that you assign professionals to teaching tasks only as a last resort, and only if all other options are exhausted (e.g. substitute teachers, specialist teachers, secondary school teachers, education program graduates). Professionals must be allowed to dedicate their efforts to their primary task, namely that of supporting at-risk students.

Teacher training on distance learning

Starting today, the first training modules on distance learning, developed by Université TELUQ, are available. This is a 15- to 20-hour training session that focuses on the following four areas: adapting a course to distance learning, sharing training resources, supporting students from a distance, and evaluating student learning from a distance.

Using digital technology, participants will have access to all the necessary resources to adapt their courses and teaching practices to distance learning. No prior knowledge of information technology is required.

I encourage teachers, as well as all school staff members who wish to do so, to take advantage of this free training. I believe that it will be particularly useful as schools gradually reopen. For more information or to register for this training, please go to <https://jenseigneadistance.telug.ca> (available in French only for now).

Gradual reopening: A new tool at your disposal

In order to give the school network maximum flexibility when reopening the schools, and after discussion with our school network partners, it will be possible, for school service centres who wish to do so, to spread the return to school over three days, based on the different school cycles.

For example, for an educational institution located outside of the Montréal metropolitan community region, the authorities in the school board and the school's administration can choose to have students in preschool and Elementary Cycle One return to class on May 11, bring in the Cycle Two students on May 12 and, finally, have Cycle Three students return to class on May 13. In some cases, this approach can facilitate welcoming students back to school. However, it is important to note that after these three days, all registered students must be back in school.

CNESST guide on the return to work

To respond to the concerns of the education sector related to the spread of COVID-19, the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité au travail (CNESST) has published a guide for the school network.

The guide is a result of collaboration between union associations and employer associations to determine the measures to be implemented in schools to ensure the safety of students and staff members and to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Administrators and staff should refer to this guide during the current reorganization of schools. Please see the [CNESST Guide](#) for more information (available in French only).

Vocational training and adult general education

As you know, students in vocational training and adult general education can continue their studies using various methods (online courses, distance learning, etc.)

I would like to remind you that the parts of vocational training that require students to be present in a laboratory or a workshop, or that require handling materials, may take place on site, but there must not be more than 50% of students present in class and the guidelines of the public health authorities must be respected.

Provided that the 2-metre physical distancing rule is respected and considering that the main goal is to allow these students to complete their training, evaluation sessions can take place. However, the basic conditions that have been previously announced must still be respected: smaller groups and appropriate sanitary measures. Additionally, because businesses are gradually reopening based on the plan to relaunch the economy, if it is not possible to complete an internship, the order in which competencies are taught can be changed to allow learning to continue until internships are possible.

Regarding adult general education, access to centres will be permitted for smaller groups in order to write the ministerial examinations, starting May 11 (or May 19 for centres located in the Montréal metropolitan community).

A successful gradual return for students

This coming week will be crucial for the way forward. The preparatory work is going well across Québec, but we must redouble our efforts in order to succeed with this unprecedented return to classes.

In this context, I would like to once again reassure you that I am listening, and I am committed to collaboration. We are in close communication with all of our partners in the school network in order to respond as quickly as possible to any questions that may arise as well as to ensure the best possible conditions for our schools to reopen. Many of the measures described in this letter are the result of exceptional collaboration with them, and I would like to thank them.

Is organizing the return to school simple? The answer is no. But the school network in Québec is made up of people who are competent, creative, empathetic, motivated and, above all, committed to the success of our young people.

Together, we are capable of meeting this challenge.

Yours truly,

Jean-François Roberge

Minister of Education and Higher Education