

COVID-19 Pandemic - An Updated Plan for Education: Important Steps to Keep Our Schools Open and Support Academic Success

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QUEBEC CITY, Jan 8, 2021 /CNW Telbec/ - In order to ensure a return to school in the safest conditions on January 11 and 18, the Minister of Education, Jean-François Roberge, accompanied by Dr. Richard Massé, Strategic Medical Advisor of Public Health, announces the implementation of a series of new educational and sanitary measures. This updated plan will provide students and staff with all the support they need to continue the school year.

Introducing a tutoring program and additional measures for academic success and mental health

First, to further support students experiencing academic difficulties, the government announces the launch of various tutoring programs that will begin at the end of January. Through the *Answer the Call!* platform, a bank of tutors will be established and a call will be made to volunteer school service centre staff, education retirees, and college and university students to support students in need. Teachers will be able to direct their students to these free services. Educational forums accessible to students, seven days a week, will also be organized in collaboration with partner organizations.

In addition, a mobile App will be created allowing young people to have access to many resources, testimonials, videos, etc. This initiative, in collaboration with partner organizations, aims to provide more psychosocial support and strengthen the safety net needed for students to reach their full potential. In addition, discussion forums on topics that meet the needs of young people will be established to help break isolation and provide avenues for managing stress. A messaging service (Chat App), accessible throughout Quebec, will also be supported by moderators and speakers.

Cancellation of ministerial exams and postponement of the first report card

As announced last fall, the current school year will consist of only two stages instead of three. In addition, given the situation, the production of the first report card, scheduled for January 22,

may be postponed until February 5, if necessary. Also, as requested by several stakeholders, we will change the weighting of the report cards so that the first report card will be given less weight than the second. A new clear guide summarizing the essential knowledge to be taught is also being produced by the Ministry and will be made available to teachers by the end of January. Under these conditions, the ministerial exams in elementary and secondary schools are cancelled for the 2020-2021 school year.

Distance learning: computer equipment for all

We can now confirm that all school service centres have enough computer equipment to meet the needs of all elementary and secondary students who do not have equipment at home. Thanks to orders made last June, as well as the new Ministry reserve of computer equipment put in place at the request of the Minister of Education, all students will have access to a computer device to continue their distance learning.

Enhanced sanitary measures

In addition to these new educational and psychosocial support measures, additional sanitary measures will be taken to minimize the spread of the virus in schools. Therefore, upon returning to school, a face covering will be mandatory in the classroom for all students in grades 5 and 6 of elementary school. Students in grades 1 and 2 of elementary school will be required to wear a face covering when travelling indoors, in all common areas and on school transport. In addition, all high school, vocational training and adult general education students will be required to wear a procedural mask rather than a face covering. These masks will be provided at a rate of two per day.

Finally, in order to ensure rigorous air quality control in schools, tests were carried out last December to measure the level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in 330 school buildings. The results obtained show optimal results, below the target of 1,000 ppm of CO₂, in the vast majority of the classrooms tested. However, immediate interventions will be required for approximately 3% of the premises tested. Also, school service centres (SSCs) and school boards (SBs) will be required to conduct air quality tests across all schools in the school system, now and annually, to ensure compliance. Rapid interventions will also be made when necessary, in line with the new recommendations issued by public health authorities following the report made by a group of scientific and technical experts, coordinated by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Experts who are members of a professional order will be appointed by a multi-party government committee (formed by the MEQ-MSSS-CNESST) to work on and contribute to this measure.

Quote

“Last June, we presented a solid plan, developed with the expertise of school network partners and public health authorities, allowing all students to return to class in September after several long months at home. This plan has paid off, thanks in part to the incredible work of the school staff. Unlike other places in the world, we have always prioritized the presence of students in the classroom, and we are eager to continue to do so in 2021. To ensure that our students

continue to learn, socialize and develop in the best possible conditions, we are now updating our plan with new adjustments that take into account both the sanitary and educational situation in our schools. We are convinced that the new measures announced will not only reduce the pressure on students, their parents and staff, but will also provide additional support to the students who need it most and thus end this exceptional school year in a strong position.”

Jean-François Roberge, Minister of Education

Reminders about returning to class

- Elementary schools will open on January 11.
- Secondary schools, adult education and vocational training centres will open on January 18.
- However, in secondary schools, special classes or special schools that provide regional or supra-regional schooling services to severely disabled students, as well as private schools specializing in special education, will be able to continue to receive their students in school following the usual school calendar. It will also be possible for the school team to allow certain students with learning disabilities or learning difficulties (EHDA) or vulnerable students whom they have identified beforehand, to receive in-presence educational services beginning January 18.
- For this same period, in regions where the Internet is inaccessible or inadequate for distance learning, under the supervision of non-teaching staff, exceptionally, students will be able to visit schools to take advantage of the Internet network for distance learning. In all these cases, physical distancing measures and sanitary rules must be respected when students or staff are present.
- With regard to vocational training and general adult education students, where the program or the skills to be acquired so require, in particular, to master practical learning on specific equipment or in the laboratory, these services may be offered in-presence from January 11.

Related link

- To learn more about coronavirus, the public is invited to visit:
<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/>