



President's Message

Welcome back. These are crazy times and I appreciate that many of you are feeling anxious. We are isolated from our colleagues, our students and much of our community. We are also facing new challenges and many of you are working harder than you ever have: learning new technology and trying to figure out how you are going to deliver learning opportunities to your students and connect with all their families. Others of you have seen your work disappear and are wondering how you are going to manage financially. Now, more than ever, we need to be taking care of and supporting ourselves and our loved ones as best we can.

If you are struggling, remember to reach out to your personal support network. Also the BCTF and the district offer a variety of supports you may want to access. The district offers [EFAP](#) services for you and your family. The BCTF, in addition to its Health and Wellness Program, also offers an online mental health and wellness tool called [Starling Minds](#).

As teachers, we play an important role in this crisis. We connect with some of the most vulnerable members of our society and offer some normalcy and structure to their lives. More than ever, you matter

Education in the Age of COVID-19

The Ministry of Education has released a number of documents in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The BCTF had input into the development of these documents and they are being used around the province to provide the framework for moving forward. Doug Kunzelman, in Creston, and I consult these documents regularly to inform our collaborative work with the district, so decisions are made to ensure the safety of everyone, using the best health information available under the direction of the Ministry of Health and Provincial Health Officer.

The Ministry of Education has emphasized to school boards that our locals are key stake holders and must be consulted with early and often. The BCTF is supporting us by providing ongoing intensive support from our field service reps and executive committee. We have frequent conference calls (three weekly), for updates from the Ministry and to assess what is happening provincially.

The Ministry's first guiding principal is that health and safety is everyone's number one priority. This has necessitated the suspension of in-class instruction so that we can all socially distance ourselves from others including our co-workers. This guiding principal also means that districts must "ensure a healthy and safe environment for all students, families, and employees." Most SD8 teachers are presently working from home. Some school locations will have staggered work schedules and limited building access. If you are going into your building, your admin should know when you are arriving and when you are leaving to ensure that there are not too many people in the building at one time. If you are ill, please do not enter any school site.

The second priority of the government is to provide services needed to support children of our essential workers. These children range in ages from 5-12. In SD8, this employment is being offered to our TTOCs. Although it takes careful planning, it is possible to fulfil this need in a way that does not jeopardize health and safety or increase the spread of COVID. Members taking on this work should review the site safety plans and follow safety protocols to protect their own health as well as the health of the community. This is an important service schools are providing to ensure hospitals in the province are well staffed and able to support those who are the sickest due to this virus.

The Ministry's third guiding principal is to support vulnerable students who may need special assistance. We do not yet know what exactly what this will entail, but I am in frequent communication with the Superintendent and

Maintaining your BC Teaching Certificate

Normally SD8 deducts TTOCs Annual Practice Fee of \$80 from their April pay and forwards it to the Ministry of Education/Minister of Finance as appropriate. But if you don't work this April, the employer will not have any earnings from you to forward to the Minister, so you will have to make the payment yourself. **If this payment is not received by May 31, then your certification will expire and you will no longer be able to teach in the public school system this fall.** [The following link](#) will point you in the right direction for paying your certification fee. Unless you know that you absolutely will not be working for April, I would advise you to wait until after April 30 before you pay the certification fee. My understanding is that you may not be able to get a refund or apply an overpayment to a future year.

Graduation

The Ministry has made it clear that all students who are on track to graduate will graduate. Conversations are ongoing regarding students who may have been struggling to meet graduation requirements. The priority will be on the 80 credits and courses needed for graduation. The Ministry is not mandating or specifying the minimum number of hours that must be completed for a student to receive credit for a Grade 10, 11, or 12 course. The focus is on determining if, and how, sufficient learning has taken place during these exceptional circumstances. Sufficient learning will be determined by teachers using their professional judgement.

Education in the Age of COVID (cont)

we will be discussing this topic in the coming week. In addition to students who are identified as being vulnerable, we need to keep in mind that students who were not vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 outbreak may begin experiencing mental health challenges as the pandemic evolves.

Specialist teachers, educational assistants, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists and others who support vulnerable students will continue to have a role to play in students' lives.

The final guiding principal from the Ministry is to provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students. The initial phase of continuity of educational opportunities is a needs assessment. This week many of you have been working with your principals to determine how to do this. You have started contacting your families in order to begin a conversation around what resources the family has available. I have heard heart warming stories from many of you as you collaborate with your colleagues and plan how to move to remote teaching and learning. I know that you are all working incredibly hard to make this shift a success for your students. Social and emotional support are at the heart of much that we do and will continue to make a difference in students' lives.

Technology: The Ministry has communicated to districts that teachers will use their professional judgement in determining how to communicate with students. Everyone understands that it is unrealistic to expect that teachers will simply switch to online delivery.

The Ministry has stated that some teachers will connect with their students in a primarily online environment. Others will use strategies that utilize more traditional resources. Educators everywhere will need to be sensitive to the fact that not all students have regular (or any) access to technology, so allowances should be made for "low tech" ways for students to engage in learning experiences.

The BCTF cautions members against using personal devices for work and against rapidly adopting new platforms without adequate training and administrative support.

Reporting: The Ministry has indicated that teachers across the province are empowered to determine a final grade for children based on work completed to-date and the assessment of participation in learning opportunities that will occur over the coming months. Teachers are expected to prepare cards for their students in June.

The evaluation of learning taking place after the suspension of in-class instruction should be in relation to a smaller selection of learning standards which students are able to complete.

British Columbia's Student Reporting Policy allows significant flexibility for schools and school districts regarding the content and format of report cards.

Access to Sick Leave and Return from Leave

BCPSEA has provided the following advice to districts on medical information required to access sick leave and return to work after illness during our current health crisis:

*Employees who are exhibiting symptoms of illness, whether they are diagnosed with COVID-19 or any other illness, would access the sick leave available to them in the normal manner. The Provincial Health Officer (PHO) is asking employers to permit employees to access sick leave **without requiring a medical note** in order to avoid undue stress on the health care system. Given the PHO's request, districts' normal practices and/or collective agreement requirements will not apply on a without prejudice and precedent basis.*

Prior to returning to work, employees who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or any other illness requiring extended absence from work may be required to present the district with medical clearance from a recognized medical practitioner that they are healthy and able to safely return to work.

In addition to this information, the district recently sent out a document titled **Leave Reasons During Covid-19**. This latter document seems to be causing quite a lot of confusion among members. There are two things to note: First, this document was written before our Superintendent made the decision that teachers were to work from home. Second, this document applies to all SD8 employees and many of our CUPE colleagues are still currently required to report to SD8 buildings for work.

In light of this information, if you are self-isolating due to travel outside the country or if you are sick but you are still able to work and are working, you should not be creating an absence in SFE. You will be paid for these days. However, if circumstances change and we are directed to report to our school sites before the end of the school year, the expectation is that you will create an absence in SFE and stay home if you are experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19 regardless of whether or not you have been diagnosed with the virus.

Onsite Care for Essential Workers

The district is in the process of arranging on-site educational instruction for children of frontline medical and health care essential workers (tier 1 - doctors, nurses, paramedics, etc.) with the priority being given to single parents. This is something that all districts are being called upon to do to ensure that medical and health care workers are available to do their work during the COVID-19 crisis.

These services will be offered from 7:00 am—7:00 pm five days a week at multiple school sites. The reason for using multiple school sites is to ensure low numbers of people at each school site. The children will range from Kindergarten through grade 6.

These jobs will be filled on a volunteer basis and will be offered first to our TTOCs and EAs who are presently not working. There will be strict protocols and a low ratio of adults to children to help ensure safety for everyone. My understanding is that these will be six-hour shifts. The posting for these positions recently went out. You may choose to consider applying for this work opportunity.

ROEs for TTOCs

The district has informed the union that it will issue ROEs to all TTOCs at this time. There was some worry from TTOCs who are paying for benefits that they would lose those benefits. Chandra Singh assured me that those who have applied for benefits, engaged for a year and therefore will not lose these benefits. He also explained that these are exceptional circumstances and that this is not considered an official lay-off.

I understand that this may be a financially challenging time for many of you. You may qualify for the [Canada Emergency Response Benefit](#). The [BCTF Assistance Society](#) also provides emergency financial aid. The following [document](#) summarizes other supports that may be available to you.