

Maple Ridge Teachers' Association

MEMORANDUM

May 5, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The purpose of this memo is to clarify current issues and information from the district that is proving to be confusing and upsetting for many members. We hope to be as clear as possible given that there are still many unknowns, conflicting information, and that things have been and will continue to change daily.

Let's start with some 'knowns'

1. We have no 'playbook' for how this is all supposed to go. Everything is new and constantly changing.
2. Our Province is under a State of Emergency. This brings new rules, which include the ability for the school district to direct or redeploy its employees to do work necessary under this State of Emergency.
3. Due to our current State of Emergency, Dr. Bonnie Henry and the Ministry of Health decide what is and is not safe to do in relation to COVID 19, including the provision of school. It has been determined that it is safe to be servicing some children in schools under strict health and safety protocols. Dr. Bonnie Henry will decide when schools will reopen and under what capacity and with what safety measures. The Ministry of Education in consultation with the BCTF and other partner groups will determine how this return to school will look. It is still very unclear if schools will open again before the end of the school year.
4. Worksafe Provisions remain in place. Any employee has the right to refuse unsafe work if they feel unsafe. The link below provides more detail on this.

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/create-manage/rights-responsibilities/refusing-unsafe-work>

5. Our guiding document is the **Supporting the K-12 Education Response to COVID 19 in B.C.**. It can be found here:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k12-c19-ipf.pdf>

This document was also attached to the email Sylvia Russell sent on May 4, 2020. The framework document was created by the Ministry of Education and in consultation with the BCTF and other provincial partners. It is supported by the BCTF and by the MRTA. It is updated frequently, the most current version dated May 1st. Our memo of April 1st first outlined this document. We will refer to it as the **K-12 ERC**. We encourage you to read relevant parts.

6. The MRTA leadership supports the care and education of students. Our work is to ensure that the best interests and safety of our members is prioritized within this care and education of students.

The following is a list of topics that we would to clarify for you below:

- Guiding Principles
- Post-April 30th Pay
- Health & Safety
- Essential Workers' Children
- Supporting Vulnerable Students
- Continuity of Educational Opportunities - Assessment
- Attendance
- Supporting Staff

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles in the **K-12 ERC**, and in order of priority, are:

1. Ensure a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.
2. Provide the services needed to support children of our essential workers.
3. Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
4. Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

Our work is to ensure, that K-12 ERC Guiding Principle #1 remains so as we work through the other three principles. It is clearly stated in this document (**K-12 ERC** - Governance, pg.7) that districts should develop a rightsholder/stakeholder advisory team to engage key members in the planning process. **This has not happened in SD42.** Although MRTA leadership has met (more frequently at first) with the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent, these meetings have proven to be less about cooperative planning and authentic consultation and more about 'presentations' describing what the district is planning to do. We have felt extremely frustrated that many of our concerns have not been listened to, addressed, or acted upon. Local Presidents meet 3 times a week to share their experiences during this time. Unfortunately SD42 falls into a very small category of districts that have marginalized the union and do work together as partners as it has been outlined by the Ministry as a requirement.

One of our frustrations has been in regards to a lack of clear communication. Recommendations for communications are laid out on pg. 10 of **K-12 ERC** and indicate that communications should come from the district office rather than through school administrators. We have repeatedly emphasised the necessity for this. Unfortunately this is not the route that the district has taken and it has caused unnecessary confusion and misinformation. We have dealt with countless issues in regards to this.

We would like to point out that we have been much more involved with other members of the senior team and management to work collaboratively on such things as the assessment documents, and the health and safety plans and protocols. This has been constructive, authentic, and positive work.

Post-April 30 Pay Continuity

An email was sent to all staff last night, May 4th, discussing continuity of pay. **It is the understanding of the BCTF that no contracted teacher's pay will be affected.** We have confirmed with the Director of Human Resources that the information in this letter does not apply to teachers; that teachers are seen to be engaging in 'meaningful work'.

Health and Safety

We believe, from our visits and observation at the 'Hubs', in discussion with volunteering members, and in our involvement with the District Safety Manager and District Safety Committee, that at this time the district is doing its due diligence and satisfying **K-12 ERC Guiding Principle #1** in providing as safe a work environment as possible for the provision of supporting and educating students as described in the guiding principles. This is a continual process; however, and new issues arise frequently.

We understand that there is conflicting information and a lack of data about the COVID-19 in children, as well as the necessity/risks of using masks and gloves (PPE). **In our opinion, the protocols and procedures in SD42 have been developed responsibly and in accordance with the recommendations of the Ministry of Health and Worksafe.** When following these protocols and procedures, it is deemed that the risk of transmission is low in schools. This is different than when working at health care sites.

It is important for those with physical vulnerabilities or those who live with someone who has a vulnerability to be informed by reading all of the materials that are presented to you. New material has been created by the District Safety Manager and will be shared with you in training for working with students. If you have a physical vulnerability and feel that you are at risk, you should discuss the risks with your doctor and seek advice, given the recommendations that we are expected to follow. This medical advice could include accommodations for your work in order to be safe given your circumstances.

Essential Service Workers' Childcare

With the implementation of **K-12 ERC Guiding Principle #2**, the district has established sites at two locations in Maple Ridge: Alexander Robinson Elementary and Hammond Elementary. Currently these sites are providing care to approximately 60 students for children of Tier 1 level workers. The staff at these sites have been working on a mainly voluntary basis since the sites open, except for several Permanent TTOCS. We have visited the sites and are satisfied that the health and safety measures that are in place are solid. All people are screened before entering the buildings. The students are in family groups of 6 students, and these groups do not interact. There are day custodians at each site and cleaning is done frequently. Students who show any symptoms are immediately taken to an isolation room and parents are phoned to take the students home.

The district has plans to expand this service to Tier 2 level workers in the coming weeks. Unfortunately, there are no longer enough volunteers available and the district is looking at ways to address this. **We maintain that TTOCs be given the opportunity to do this work, but the district is unwilling to do this.** BCTF is adamant that this work is to be done on a voluntary basis and only for those people who are willing, comfortable, and physically able to step into these roles. Teachers are working very hard and contracted teachers should not be expected to work more. **How the provision of a larger group of children of Essential Service Workers will be staffed is yet to be determined but this is where eventual direction of work or redeployment may happen. If this becomes a reality for you, please contact us immediately.**

Supporting Vulnerable Students

On the evening of May 4, 2020, you received an email from the superintendent regarding this next phase of service, **K-12 ERC Guiding Principle #3**. It is clear that there are many students and families who are struggling at this time and who will benefit greatly from this service. There is no clear criteria for what constitutes ‘vulnerable’ but staff members should have been asked to identify students at their school that they would consider vulnerable. There have been about 100 students K-12 who have been identified. The district is starting with seven sites with plans to expand as need increases. Each student will have an individual plan in place that would look at the student being on site for 1-2 hours at a time, a couple of days a week, initially.

If you are the enrolling teacher or the support teacher for a student who has been identified, you will be part of the team (along with others such as Learning Service Helping Teachers, LS itinerants, EAs) planning for your student. As the enrolling teacher you hold responsibility for that student and, therefore, need to be part of this planning and support. As a support teacher with a student on your caseload, you will also be part of this planning and support. This may include working with the student at the school but not necessarily.

We need to exercise caution with how many adults are present in the building. There are no clear rules about the ratio of adult to student, but most often 1:1 will be appropriate. 2:1 will be appropriate in certain cases, especially when there are physical needs. 3:1 could also be necessary in certain circumstances. It is recommended that the timing of school visits be scheduled to avoid feeding, toileting, and other physical activities, when possible.

It is also important to remember that the amount of time given to one of your students should remain proportionate to the rest of your students. It is difficult to contemplate taking on more and this should not be the case. We recommend that you make adjustments to other areas of your work in order to balance this new requirement. All health and safety protocols, including cleaning, that exist for the ‘hubs’ will also exist in buildings when vulnerable students attend.

Continuity of Educational Opportunities - Assessment

There is a wide variety of approaches being taken to teaching and learning during the implementation of **K-12 ERC Guiding Principle #4**. Teachers are all working extremely hard. It is important to remember that we are in modified service delivery right now and should be working from a smaller set of learning objectives to prioritize essential learning. The district has developed and distributed documents that make recommendations on what assessment of learning opportunities will look like during the suspension of classes. The MRTA leadership has been deeply involved in these conversations around assessment. **It is the opinion of the MRTA, however, that it is still too early to look at what reporting at the end of June should look like, especially with the uncertainties around a return to in class instruction.** It is recommended that members also look at the **K-12 ERC** as well as the “Continuity of Learning Planning Guide for Teachers”, link below.

[Continuity of Learning Planning Guide for Teachers \(PDF\)](#) (Updated May 1, 2020)

Attendance

The MRTA has been working with the district to develop a plan for a daily check-in to ensure safety for teachers working from home. WorkSafe regulations state that when working from home, employees are required to check-in with their supervisor throughout the day to ensure the safety of the employee. Instead of having members check-in with their administrator multiple times a day, we have suggested a once a day check-in through email. This should have been implemented long ago but we are still waiting on the district for this. **In our opinion, the ADS advance booking of ‘working remotely’ is attendance management and does not serve as a safety measure.**

Supporting Staff

The **K-12 ERC** (Continuity of Supports, pg. 32) highlights the mental health and well-being of students, families, and staff as a top priority. On pg. 49 (Human Resources) the topic of staff well-being is addressed; that supporting the health and safety of staff is a critical component of an effective service continuity plan. School districts are encouraged to include strategies to support staff well-being as a priority area of focus in their planning. This has not been done, despite our repeated urgings. **It is our opinion that a lack of timely, clear information, along with vagueness when referring to continuity of pay, ‘meaningful work’, and ‘under-utilization’ do the exact opposite.** This is shameful for a district that supposedly prides itself on the social and emotional well-being of all and whose vision is for every individual to feel valued.

We hope that this memo has helped to provide some clarity for you. You will most certainly have more questions. Please reach out to your staff rep, who can forward those questions and concerns to us. **We will be having an Emergency Staff Rep Assembly this Thursday, May 7th at 4pm.**

In solidarity,

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