

Maple Ridge Teachers' Association

April 1st, 2020

Memo RE: 'Supporting the K-12 Education Response to COVID-19 in BC' : Integrated Planning Framework for School Districts - BC Ministry of Education

The MRTA leadership team would like to acknowledge that you may be feeling pressure to have all of the answers right now, but we want to assure you that everyone is still figuring this out. This is an unprecedented time and we appreciate all of the support that has been shown towards one another through this experience. We believe that it would be pertinent to share the following with members, as there is new information that will help clarify some things.

Supporting the K-12 Education Response to COVID-19 in B.C. is a document just released by the Ministry of Education. Its purpose is to support school districts in developing plans to deliver educational opportunities and educational support during this pandemic event. It contains a mountain of information, so we would like to highlight key areas. This ministry document was done in consultation with, and is supported by the BCTF. It can be found [here](#).

Guiding Principles. The plans outlined in this document are guided by the following principles:

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.

These principles are in order of priority. The health and safety of students, families and teachers is the number one priority of everyone. Everything else will happen once the health and safety of everyone is ensured.

What is the definition of 'continuity of educational opportunities'? The introduction of this document states that "it will be important to ensure that all partners have the common understanding that learning environments and related services will look very different from regular operations." (p. 3) **Things will not be proceeding as normal!** Teachers are to provide students with opportunities that "allow for a variety of learning experiences to develop literacy and numeracy skills, support social, emotional and physical well-being, and continue their studies in content areas across the curriculum." (p. 13)

It is important to note that it is "expected that students will be connected to their teachers **no later than mid-April.**" (p.13) Yes, you read that correctly. There is no rush to have everything up and operational right now. Even though our district indicated that they would like learning opportunities to be initiated by April 6th, they now understand that this will take more time than first thought.

There are many different ways teachers will connect with students to provide learning opportunities. This can be achieved “through individual or group phone calls, email, video connection or hard copy communication.” (p. 13) No matter which option you choose, “students will benefit from knowing they are still part of a learning community.” (p. 14) It is important to remember that we don’t have all the answers and that we “are all starting from different places in our commitment to the different delivery of educational opportunities.” (p. 14)

Our students may not all have access to technology and we can also provide opportunities in “low-tech” ways to those students in these circumstances. The district is cognizant of the struggles that our families face (as well as staff members), as well as the many issues that may affect a student’s ability to participate in learning opportunities. However, we also must be cautious to do what we can to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 by exchanging materials with families. Thoughtful consideration of this in our planning will help ensure the safety of everyone. This Ministry document states that “subject to current recommendations by the Provincial Health Officer, schools and school districts may facilitate the distribution of physical learning resources such as books, toolkits, or instructional packages. If this is something your district is considering, it will be essential to follow health guidelines regarding sanitizing of materials.” (p. 16) The District is consulting with our Medical Health Officer about this.

How will I assess and report? The Ministry document clearly indicates that teacher autonomy is key. It states 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.” (p. 15) Also noted in the document is that “since many students may not have easy access to specific learning resources aligned to the curriculum, summative assessment should focus on the development of competencies and key literacy and numeracy skills, rather than mastery of specific content.” (p. 15) **There will be more to come on assessment and reporting.**

What about resources, tools, and technology options? Some considerations are that “making regular connections between staff, families and students can happen in a variety of ways. Phone calls and hard copy text are low-tech ways to connect, while video conferencing or setting up virtual classrooms are more high-tech solutions.” (p. 15) Ultimately, it is up to each teacher to determine the best format to deliver instructions. **You have professional autonomy.**

What about the grad program? In this unique time the Ministry is committed to the continuity of learning leading to final marks for all students, and that the **students who are eligible and on track to graduate will do so.** Students in grades 10 and 11 should focus on courses in subject areas required for graduation. The Ministry expressed that “for students in grade 12 on track to graduate this year, the focus should be on the total 80 credits needed for graduation.” (p.19) Elective courses are still of significant importance to students but the delivery of these courses will likely be more difficult (ex. courses with required equipment or unique environments like wood and metal shops, work experience,

band, or trades). Again, “teachers have the discretion to provide a passing grade if *sufficient learning* has been achieved.” (p. 20)

The Ministry has made it clear that it **“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. Hours do not necessarily reflect the actual learning that occurs. The focus is on determining if, and how, *sufficient learning* has taken place during these exceptional circumstances.” (p. 20) It is important to remember that **“sufficient learning will be determined by teachers using their professional judgement”** (p. 20) and that:

Teachers are empowered to determine a final grade for students based on work completed to-date and the **assessment of participation in learning opportunities** that will occur over the coming months. Teachers will work with students to fulfill course requirements according to their school/school district plans during the suspension of in-class instruction. In doing so, they will consider those students whose learning needs or circumstances may require unique approaches. (p. 20)

We would like to express how important the bolded portion above is. Planning should be reflective of this unique circumstance and assessment should be adjusted accordingly. Summative assessment will be **focused on assessing a student’s participation in learning opportunities**. This means not simply moving an existing course online with the same expectations as in the classroom when it comes to activities, assignments and workload. Due to how uncertain the situation currently is, it is important to be mindful of the adverse situations our students and their families may be facing in the coming weeks.

The Ministry has assured everyone that: “Every student eligible to graduate this year will graduate. To be eligible to graduate means that if a student were to successfully complete courses underway and in progress for completion this June, they would satisfy all graduation requirements. This does not mean that students will graduate “no matter what”. **“Students are expected to continue their learning and complete the assignments set out by their teachers in order to graduate.”** (p. 21)

Another document, **The Continuity of Learning Planning Guide for Teachers** offers more support and suggestions. It can also be found [here](#).

It is our intention that this memo helps ease some of the anxiety and stress our members are facing. Remember, this is unfamiliar territory for everyone and you are not alone. Connecting with your colleagues to find a way forward will be helpful.

Please do not hesitate to contact Penny Morgan, Acting President (penny@mrtaoffice.ca), Kaitlin Thorarinson, Acting 1st Vice President (kaitlin@mrtaoffice.ca) or Trevor Takasaki, Acting 2nd Vice President (trevor_takasaki@sd42.ca) if you have any questions or concerns during this extraordinary time.

In solidarity, Penny, Kaitlin, and Trevor

PM/KT/TT/em

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