

September 3rd, 2020

Member Update

Today is the first official day of the 2020-2021 school year for all staff. The leadership that has been shown by all PSAANS members in these ambiguous times has been instrumental to building capacity for a safe return to school. We recognize that this has not been easy. Thank you for your dedication and professionalism.

We turn to the experts at the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health for guidance and procedures for dealing with all public health matters. Following the advice of Public Health has allowed our province to resume many activities while balancing measures such as mask use in public spaces and self-isolation protocols for those entering from outside the Atlantic Bubble. This is further evidenced by the very low number of active COVID-19 cases in the province and the successful testing that is confirming cases when they develop.

Administrators must now navigate the most challenging school opening of our careers. Throughout the summer, and especially in the last couple of weeks, administrators have been developing school based plans that meet the standards for their local context as established by the Back to School Plan. Regions and the CSAP have also responded by ensuring that schools are equipped with necessary resources such as PPE, supplies and necessary building maintenance.

We believe that schools will be prepared to welcome students back when three components are present. Preparedness will depend on:

- resources available for a safe return consistent with Public Health standards;
- procedures in place to manage the movement and supervision of students;
- participation of all employees within their role and responsibilities.

Anecdotally we are hearing from many administrators that their schools are prepared or moving towards preparedness. We recognize that all of us to varying degrees are experiencing a level of concern, anxiety or worry. This is normal during these unprecedented times. As an administrator, if you have outstanding concerns or issues in your school, you are strongly advised to contact your Region or the CSAP for additional support.

As the school year unfolds we will all have to rely on the expertise of our medical professionals in response to new research and the current epidemiology of COVID-19 in the province. As leaders we have to be responsive to these dynamic conditions, adapt our school plans and provide the leadership that is necessary for our school communities.

Advocacy

The Association continues to advocate on behalf of all administrators for the tools and resources that are necessary to successfully implement the Back to School Plan, lead with assurance and inspire the confidence of the staff and school community. Today we would like to provide an update on some developments that are direct results from the working partnership that we have with the Deputy Minister, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the education entities.

In our communication from August 7th we expressed the need for administrators to be able to focus their attention on the implementation of the Back to School plan as a guiding principle for making decisions about workload this year. We have had strong support for this perspective from the Deputy Minister in principle along with some substantive solutions.

- **Staff Performance Appraisals**
The Deputy Minister has advised us that there will be a significant reduction in the number of staff performance appraisals to be completed this year. We proposed suspending appraisals for permanent staff where there are no performance concerns.
- **Student Success Planning**
The model for Student Success Planning will also look different this year, to be timely and responsive to the demands being made of administrators. Finding out how the students are doing on a social, emotional and academic level are key components of the Back to School plan, and supports are being developed to help administrators explore this question with their staff in a way that reduces the time and formal requirements, but supports administrators in answering and responding to the question, “How are the children doing?”

Further information about these points will be forthcoming from your RCE or the CSAP. The purpose is to allow administrators to focus their full attention on the Back to School Plan.

Top five questions for the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health

In an effort to provide as much guidance as possible to administrators we have asked the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide answers to the following five questions identified as priorities. Answers to these questions will provide a level of detail necessary for administrators

to respond to inquiries from staff, students, parents and guardians. Through our collaboration with the EECD an opportunity is forthcoming for Dr. Strang to address these questions specifically for administrators. Further details will be announced when they are available.

1. Why is there a substantial difference in the physical distancing requirements for schools and why is it different in circumstances outside of school?
2. What is the explanation for the range of circumstances that would lead to a switch between Scenario 1, Scenario 2, or Scenario 3 for schools in a Community or in a Region?
3. Mask Usage - The rules are clear for students from grades 4-12 but different for those in the earlier grades. Other than age what other factors are involved?
4. Following the checklist for parents and the protocol in the Back to School plan, how do administrators determine the next steps when a child presents a symptom(s) that is on the list of those associated with COVID-19?
5. What is the typical Public Health protocol that schools will implement if a single student or staff case is identified?

Administrators continue to take direction and rely on the expertise of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The answers to these questions will help with many conversations as schools reopen for staff and students.

With sincere appreciation for your work and efforts,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Simony', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Tim Simony,

Chair