

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

May 20, 2020

TO ALL PARTNERS IN THE EDUCATION NETWORK

In response to recent developments, I would like to provide you with further information concerning the continuation of the 2019-2020 school year.

Update: Preschools and elementary schools in hot zones

Extension of school closures

Given the progression of the epidemiological situation and following the recommendation of the Direction générale de santé publique, the Premier has announced that the closure of preschools and elementary schools located in the territory of the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (Montréal metropolitan community, CMM) and in the territory of the regional county municipality (RCM) of Joliette will be extended until the end of the school year.

I realize that some of you may be disappointed by this decision, and we all would have hoped to be able to reopen these schools. However, in these exceptional circumstances, the health and safety of our students and our school staff must take precedence over any other considerations, and I thank you for your understanding.

Nevertheless, secondary schools in the CMM and the RCM of Joliette that offer specialized schooling services to particularly vulnerable students can reopen, subject to future government decisions, provided they comply with the previously announced health measures. Returning to school will not only allow these students, who cannot remain at home unsupervised, to consolidate their learning and socialize, but will also provide parents with a much-needed break, thereby helping to prevent distress and exhaustion in these families. The different schools will have to adapt to these students' individual characteristics to ensure that their needs are met. Therefore, we hope that these schools will prepare in anticipation of this reopening.

Note that emergency daycare services remain available in the CMM and the RCM of Joliette and that school staff members will have access to these services until the end of the school year.

Continuation of distance learning

The school year is not yet over, and must continue at a distance for all preschool, elementary and secondary school students in the CMM. To that end, I would like to remind school staff that full-time work is expected until the end of the school year. While the terms and conditions under which this work is performed may vary according to the needs of each school, the following guidelines must be observed:

- The aim is for students to maintain their acquired learning and to continue their essential learning.
- A weekly work plan provided by the teachers allows students to create a work schedule and structure their learning.
- Increased availability enables the teaching staff to answer questions from both students and parents.
- At the elementary level, a member of the school team will contact the student directly at least three times per week (by telephone or video conference). Contact should be more frequent with more vulnerable students.
- At the secondary level, a teacher aid will be assigned to each student, while a resource person will be assigned to students with an individualized education plan. These staff members should contact the student at least once per week (by telephone or video conference), in addition to the group meetings held remotely.
- Increased availability enables non-teaching education professionals to support vulnerable students and hold individual virtual meetings with students.

It bears repeating that these guidelines must be followed. Now that the school staff in the CMM are able to devote all their energy to the continuation of distance learning, all students must be able to receive high-quality pedagogical support from this week forward until the end of the school year. I also want to remind you that the same conditions apply to students outside the CMM who continue their learning from home.

Vocational training and adult general education in hot zones

In vocational training, educational and teaching services may resume. Courses and exams may take place in classrooms, in groups of a maximum of 15 students. In adult

general education, local and ministerial examinations may resume in classrooms, in small groups of no more than 15 adult learners. This resumption of services must comply with the rules established by the Direction générale de santé publique with regard to group size (maximum of 15 individuals), proper hygiene in facilities (cleaning, washing of hands) and physical distancing (2 metres).

Considering how the situation has progressed in the CMM, all in-person instruction and on-site evaluations must be avoided in vocational training and adult education centres located in this region. Vocational training activities of a theoretical nature may take place using distance learning wherever possible. In adult general education, all activities must take place using distance learning. More detailed information in this regard will be released at a later date.

Loan of technological equipment

Because distance learning activities have continued for a greater number of students than expected, it is necessary to make sure that all these students have access to technological tools enabling them to continue their education. Various technological tools are available in schools and should already have been distributed to students who need them. Any material that can be loaned and is still available must be offered to students immediately. In addition, a large number of electronic tablets is still available under the agreement established with Apple and Telus. I encourage you once again to place your orders as soon as possible. Be assured that the order processing times will be kept to a minimum to make sure that these indispensable tools can be provided to students as quickly as possible.

Students who live in a hot zone but attend school in a cold zone

After discussion with the Direction générale de santé publique, I can confirm that any students living in a hot zone but attending a school in a cold zone will be permitted to return to class as soon as their school reopens. Any students who are in this situation and whose parents have made a request to this effect must be allowed by their school to attend class, if this has not already happened.

In closing, I want to highlight the exceptional work of all those who have made the gradual reopening of schools possible. This process has been successful thanks to their actions. I also want to thank those who have helped to prepare the reopening of schools in the greater Montréal area. Please rest assured that your efforts were not in vain; they will enable us to rapidly reopen our schools when the time comes.

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We must carry on our work to ensure that all students—whether at school or at home—continue to receive a high-quality education despite the current crisis. I am counting on you.

Yours truly,

Jean-François Roberge
Minister of Education and Higher Education