



March 26, 2020

Dear SD 8 – Kootenay Lake families and staff,

We hope this message finds you and your family well during these unusual and uncertain times. As you know, the BC Government has issued a medical state of emergency for the Province of British Columbia. They are taking action to “flatten the curve” related to the spreading of the COVID-19 virus in order to support public health and safety. Some current measures being taken include asking citizens to engage in social distancing efforts, closing many public and private establishments where people gather, finding ways to support essential service employees to do their important work, and suspending in-class learning for all K to 12 students, until further notice.

**Guiding Principles for Ministry of Education during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

1. Maintaining a healthy and safe environment for students, families and staff is paramount.
2. Providing services to support children of essential workers is our top priority.
3. Supporting vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
4. Providing continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

**Initial Planning**

We have begun initial planning for future student learning and want to let you know that there will be no in-class sessions next Monday March 30, 2020. There will be no busses coming and we ask you to make an appointment with your school if there is something you need to retrieve. At this time, we are thinking of having items posted to the school website under each teachers’ name. More info to come.

- During the week of March 30 – April 3, you will be contacted by a teacher from your school to discuss how learning can continue for your child/children. We recognize that each family is unique and want to create a plan and way of delivering learning that will work best during this challenging time. We ask for your kindness, patience, and support.
- The week of April 6 – 10, onward, we will move forward with resources and the contacts you need to proceed with learning from home. Please note that it will be absolutely impossible to replicate the learning that occurs when a child is directly with their teacher. However, we are going to do our best to continue learning.

## **Ongoing Student Learning**

As per the Ministerial direction provided, all students will receive a final mark, will continue to develop in their learning, will advance to their next grade level, and all students eligible to graduate will graduate. The Ministry of Education is currently looking into the graduation requirement of the Provincial Graduation Numeracy Assessment and will get back to Principals about this soon.

The Ministry of Education is also working with post-secondary partners to ensure continued access for graduating student applications and flexibility during our current situation. Our teachers and support staff will continue to play a key role in supporting student learning in a variety of ways.

Our Principals and teachers will endeavour to maintain ongoing communication with you and your student/students.

## **Technology needs**

We also ask that you call your school Principal if your child does not have access to Wifi or a device.

Our first priority for extensive planning will begin with students in Grade 12 to ensure immediate attention to on time successful graduation for those eligible. Educators will be planning simultaneously, to support all other students. Your child's teacher will be in contact with you.

## **Other Educational Programming**

In-class instruction for student learning is suspended until further notice, but some early learning opportunities continue, if in slightly different ways. More information to come in the next few days.

Some of our educators and EAs will be providing services for children of families working in provincially identified essential services with the priority being our medical and health care staff in Creston and Nelson hospitals. Student counselling and mental health support is available when needed.

Opportunities for students to pick up and drop off materials will be arranged. Contact your Principal for details. These items will evolve daily so please expect change to be the new norm.

## **Playgrounds are closed for your child's safety**

All school play structures will be wrapped in bright yellow or red 'caution' tape indicating they should not be accessed. Signage indicating the structures are closed will be installed at each site. This decision was made based on clear messaging from our Provincial Health Officer, and a request from the Emergency Operations Centre, about the need to implement social distancing as a strategy to help combat the spread of COVID-19. As well, we are not able to sanitize these structures. Again, this is to help us all combat COVID-19.

## Social distancing

Social distancing means making changes in your everyday routines in order to minimize close contact with others. These changes include everyone, including children and teenagers.

Specifically, everyone should:

- avoid crowded places and non-essential gatherings;
- avoid common greetings, such as handshakes and hugs;
- limit contact with people at higher risk (for example, older adults and those in poor health); and
- keeping a distance of at least 2 arms lengths (approximately 2 metres/6 feet/a hockey-stick length) from others, as much as possible.

The following are some suggestions regarding how you can practice social distancing:

- greet with a wave instead of a handshake or hug;
- stay at home as much as possible;
- limit in-person shopping to essentials;
- conduct virtual meetings;
- host virtual playdates for children; and
- use technology to keep in touch with friends and family.

## Child Stress or Anxiety

We also know that in uncertain times such as these, your child may experience stress or be anxious about what is ahead. It is very important that, as adults and advocates, we keep our messaging calm and supportive. Things will all be okay and students will return to their usual school experiences and friendships in the future. Your student is deeply cared about by our staff and we will be connecting with them shortly after the spring break. We will forward you a supportive document with talking points for working with children through uncertain situations: ***Ways to Manage Stress and Anxiety and Support Our Children.***

## Communication

We are in the process of updating our website and will provide links for parents and guardians in the coming days. As we receive updates from the Ministry of Education, we will also place these on our website. We would like to encourage you to follow us in a variety of ways:

Email – to and from the District and School Principals and soon, teachers too!

Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/sd8kootenaylk/>

Instagram – <https://www.instagram.com/sd8kootenaylake/>

Twitter - <https://twitter.com/SD8KootenayLk>

Vlogs – In person *Video updates from the Superintendent* – see website

Website – <https://www.sd8.bc.ca/>

You can also reach your school Principal or the Superintendent via email. All addresses are on the District Website.

### **Why are some KLTF and CUPE and Exempt SD 8 – Kootenay Lake staff going into work and others staying home?**

Some staff will be working from home but the rest are on the frontlines in order to help sustain our community through this pandemic. We are first and foremost, looking after health and safety and have numerous protocols in place. We are in our buildings to support the children and families who work in the medical and health care fields. We all know that educators and support staff play a critical role in our community and they are being called into action. Thirdly, we are here to support our most vulnerable children. Lastly, we are here to support you and your children in their “Continuity of Learning”. You staying home helps our employees stay safe during this time. It will take all of us to support our health care system in coming weeks and we thank you for staying home in advance. Teachers will be connecting with all of you soon. More detailed information will be sent directly to staff members tomorrow.

### **Acknowledgement**

We would like to take the opportunity to thank our amazing staff at SD8- Kootenay Lake School District who have been responsive to the rapidly evolving situation in the context of COVID-19. Custodial and maintenance staff have been keeping our schools safe and continue efforts to ensure they are ready for return of staff, and hopefully, students, sooner than later. All of the educators and support staff had already been working with our students to teach universal approaches to health and wellness - in particular, frequently washing hands (!) - and support the ongoing cleanliness of our schools. School administrators and district support staff have continued to meet and plan. As always, our many community partners have also provided critical collaboration over the past few weeks. Thank you to our CUPE and KLTF Presidents for your input as we move forward. We also acknowledge our Board of Education for their support as we work to put plans in place for our families and staff.

### **Thank you**

Thank you for taking the time to read all of this information. We will continue to take direction from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and the Interior Health Officers as developments transpire and new information is made available. Our initial plans for student learning will no doubt evolve and extend as we learn more and as each day passes. We will continue to connect with you in the near future to keep you up to date with what we know and with our planning for your student’s learning and other educational programming in our schools.

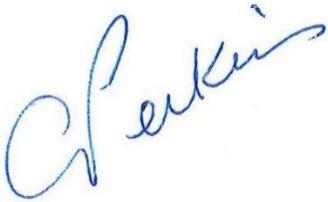
Thank you in advance to everyone for your continued support and your ongoing patience moving forward. More information will come tomorrow.

Stay healthy.

*If you have concerns about your health in relation to COVID-19, please go to the COVID-19 Symptom Assessment Tool:*

<https://bc.thrive.health/covid19>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine Perkins". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**Dr. Christine Perkins** | Superintendent & Chief Executive Officer

**School District 8 Kootenay Lake**

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