



## SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 64 (GULF ISLANDS)

112 Rainbow Road, Salt Spring Island, B.C. V8K 2K3  
T: (250) 537-5548 F: (250) 537-4200 W: sd64.bc.ca

January 7, 2022

Dear Gulf Islands Families;

As you are aware, and in response to the provincial health order announced on Wednesday December 29, 2021, the regular return to school following Winter Break was delayed a full week for most students. I would like to take this opportunity to let you know how schools and staff have worked this week to plan and prepare for the safe and successful return to regular in-class instruction on Monday January 10<sup>th</sup>.

Administrators, teachers, and support staff have been busy these past four days prior to students returning to class, to update and implement enhanced health and safety guidelines in schools. School staff have also used this time to assess and plan for potential future interruptions to in-person learning, including functional school closures resulting from widespread impacts of COVID-19.

COVID-19 cases have been rising across the district and in our communities. In response, the Province has directed school districts to develop contingency plans for continuity of learning should a functional school closure be deemed necessary. It is reasonable to anticipate the possibility of high absenteeism due to illness or required self-isolation of staff who have been exposed to COVID-19, and the potential inability to replace every employee who is absent. A functional school closure would occur if the district could not provide the required level of instruction, supervision, support, and regular sanitation to ensure the health and safety of students.

Should a functional school closure be determined necessary, schools now have plans in place to:

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

In the event of a functional closure, communication to staff, students and family will come directly from the school principal. The first day of a functional closure may involve staff preparations, communicating instructions, and sharing materials/devices with students and families. As soon as practicable, staff will provide online instruction, student support, and further communication. Staff absence levels will be assessed daily so that, when advisable, a decision to return to regular in-person instruction can be made quickly.

Processes for management and reporting of school-associated COVID-19 cases have also been adapted to reflect the changing pandemic. In a communication to school districts on January 7, 2022, the Ministry of Education and the BC CDC identified important differences in how Public Health will be responding to COVID-19 exposures, specifically:

*With higher levels of community transmission, a shorter virus incubation period, and the increased use of rapid antigen testing, contact tracing and close contact notification by public health is not effective to minimize spread of COVID-19. As such, public health management practices (including guidance for K-12 school-associated COVID-19 activity) have transitioned to established practices for other circulating viral illnesses with similar transmission characteristics. This includes individual self-management (i.e., individuals care for themselves, engaging with health care providers when needed), with public health focused on identifying and responding to larger clusters and outbreaks.*

*(COVID-19 Protocols for School & District Administrator and Staff: Management of School-Associated Activity, January 7, 2022)*

It is important to note that school closures are impossible to predict, and many factors will be considered before any decision is made to close a school. We will continue to work closely with Island Health and the Ministry of Education and will follow the most up-to-date guidance to safeguard the health and wellness of students and staff and to minimize a disruption in student learning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Benwell".

Scott Benwell, PhD  
Superintendent