

Québec, le 8 janvier 2021

COURTSEY TRANSLATION

Mesdames les Directrices générales et Messieurs les Directeurs généraux des centres de services scolaires ainsi que des commissions scolaires et des établissements d'enseignement privés,

The beginning of the year 2021 is in some ways like the beginning of the new school year. A new year and hopes are again allowed. First of all, the entire government team and I would like to offer you our best wishes for a more serene year. Our dearest wish, which you undoubtedly share, is that our students can gradually regain a certain normality and that school life will gradually return to its usual colors. We would also like to express our great appreciation for all the efforts you have made since last September to help our students succeed. We are aware that the challenge is great and that there are many constraints, but we are convinced that all together, by combining our efforts, we will succeed.

In order to ensure that the best learning conditions for our students will be preserved in the coming months, we bring to your attention a number of additional measures, both pedagogical and sanitary, which will have to be applied in the school network.

As announced by the Prime Minister, the return to elementary school will take place on January 11th as planned and will be postponed to January 18th for our secondary students. This includes the continuation of alternating courses for students in Secondary 3 to 5. Thus, for the secondary level, the teaching for all these students will continue at a distance until they return to class.

For students in vocational training and general adult education, in order to facilitate the continuation of their training, distance education services will be mandatory until January 18 as well. However, when the program or the skills to be acquired require it, notably to master practical learning on specific equipment or in the laboratory, these services may be offered in person, in a training center, starting January 11.

Specialized classes or schools that offer regional or supra-regional schooling services to severely handicapped students may, however, continue to receive their students at school according to the usual school calendar. It will be also possible for the school team to allow certain students with disabilities or with learning or adjustment difficulties (ADHD) or vulnerable students that it has identified beforehand to receive educational services in the presence of others. Distance education services are obviously favoured, but it will be up to school organizations to determine whether distance education is possible and of exceptional benefit to these few students with special needs.

In addition, in regions where the Internet is inaccessible or inadequate for distance education, students will exceptionally be able to travel to institutions to take advantage of the Internet for distance education. When required, school organizations must ensure that non-teaching school personnel are on duty. If the LTE option is available in the region, it should be preferred and the school should provide the student with a sufficient connection by lending an LTE device.

In all these cases, distancing measures and health rules when students or staff are present must be respected.

Reinforcement of pedagogical and psychosocial support

In recent weeks, we have consulted with several actors in the school network and have heard the observations that young people need additional help to succeed in the current pandemic context. We understand the urgent need to address this issue and we confirm that we will be presenting various levers to help school team personnel in this regard.

These levers will include pedagogical support for students, through the recruitment of tutors to better accompany them.

By the end of January, a bank of tutors will be created using, among other things, the "Answer Present" platform. A call will be made to volunteer staff from school service centers, retired education professionals, as well as college and university students to support the students. Teachers will be able to refer young people to these free services.

All School Service Centers and School Boards will be responsible for making this service available and coordinating efforts within their institutions. They will also be able to rely on a government initiative mobilizing college and university students who may want to come and support students. Outside of school hours, students will soon have access to educational forums available 7 days a week.

In addition to this tutoring bank, more psychosocial support, in collaboration with partner agencies, will be deployed to further strengthen the necessary safety net so that students can reach their full potential. In concrete terms, we will make various tools available to them, including a mobile application allowing them to access numerous resources, testimonials and videos.

In addition, discussion forums on themes that meet the needs of young people will be set up to help break isolation and offer avenues for managing stress. Moderating facilitators will accompany students to ensure the monitoring of a messaging system (chat) accessible to young people from all over Quebec, after school hours.

We will also announce new measures to better equip school staff members to support them in accompanying students on a daily basis. Access to specialized resources for students experiencing stress and anxiety will be facilitated.

To deploy these levers, in support of the school teams already in place, we also plan to call upon the Ministry's partner organizations that have expertise in this area, so that an entire community can mobilize around our young people. We will soon have the opportunity to come back to you with more details in this regard.

Modifications to certain pedagogical frameworks

Developments in the schools have had an impact on the ability of your schools to finalize the production of the first report card, which is due on January 22. We will therefore be proposing that the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Pedagogical Regime be amended to allow for an extension of the deadline for the production of the first bulletin until February 5, if necessary. Despite this postponement, regional college admission services will be able to receive the results of Secondary IV and V students on time. We will also propose to review the weighting of the first report card so that the first report card will have less importance.

In addition, a new clear guide summarizing the priority essential knowledge to be taught is also being produced by the Ministry and will be made available by the end of January at the latest. Under these circumstances, the ministerial tests at the primary and secondary levels are cancelled for the 2020-2021 school year.

Reinforcement of health measures

At the beginning of this year 2021, it is important to remember the importance of maintaining at all times in our schools and centers the health measures already planned, particularly in terms of distance, respiratory hygiene and the wearing of face coverings or procedure masks, hand washing and regular cleaning of surfaces. We invite you to pay particular attention to the times of day when students belonging to different stable class groups are expected to be together in order to limit these times as much as possible, for example when students access their lockers upon arrival in the morning, at lunchtime or after school. We are therefore counting on your leadership to ensure that all of your communities put in place incentives and calls for vigilance.

The Ministry has developed a toolbox to remind you of good practices for handling the face cover or procedure mask. This box, available in French and English, contains suggestions for activities and means to raise awareness among elementary and secondary school students and to teach them the expected behaviours in order to better apply public health measures in the school environment. It is a very good support for best practices review activities to be reviewed with students and can be consulted on the Ministry's website at the following address: www.education.gouv.qc.ca/masque/.

Wearing the face cover in primary school and the procedure mask in secondary school

In the red zone, as of January 11th, the wearing of face coverings will be extended in class for 3rd cycle elementary students and will be required for 1st and 2nd cycle elementary students in indoor travel as well as school transportation.

In addition, as of January 18, high school, general adult education and vocational training students will now be required to wear procedural masks instead of face masks. These procedure masks will be made available to students at a rate of two per day. Details have been provided and more will follow from the Ministry in this regard.

Air Quality

As you know, in order to ensure rigorous monitoring of air quality in schools, tests were conducted last December to measure the level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in 330 school buildings. The results obtained show optimal results, below the target of 1,000 ppm of CO₂, in the vast majority of the classes tested. However, we ask you to take immediate action in approximately 3% of the tested premises, which are not in compliance.

Also, we ask you to conduct tests in all the establishments in the school network, right now, to verify their compliance. Rapid interventions will also be carried out when necessary, in accordance with the new recommendations issued by public health authorities following the report of the group of scientific and technical experts coordinated by the Ministère de l'Éducation, de l'Éducation et de la jeunesse.

Health and Social Services, and on the basis of the Reference Document on Air Quality in Schools, while applying the measurement protocol established by the Ministry.

It is imperative that in the event that the results for a given class are unsatisfactory, further analysis be carried out. This analysis will include a more detailed review of the factors that influence these air quality results, and you must then ensure that direct means are deployed to correct the situation, including a possible increase in the frequency of ventilation in the room. If the examination of these factors and the implementation of consequent adjustments are not conclusive, relocation of the students to another classroom and the wearing of the procedure mask may be considered.

Experts who are members of a professional order and designated by a multipartite government committee (formed by the MEQ- MSSS-CNESST) will be dedicated and called upon. More precise details will be sent to you shortly regarding the technical context for the realization of these tests.

Distribution of computer equipment

We would like to salute the efforts of your IT teams who this fall ensured that all high school students who do not have dedicated equipment at home could receive one of your establishments, thus allowing distance learning in the last few days. Since the school network now has enough computer equipment to meet the needs not only of high school students, but also of elementary school students, we ask you, in this spirit of prevention, to now turn your efforts towards elementary school students who do not have dedicated equipment at home so that they can receive some in the coming days. In the event that equipment is missing from your computer stocks for this purpose, we invite you to quickly call upon the ministerial reserve according to the procedure known to your computer teams.

To maximize the impact of our concerted efforts, we thank you for informing your staff and for ensuring that it is implemented in all your targeted establishments. We would like to take advantage of this communication at the beginning of 2021 to thank you and the staff of your institutions for the diligence you have shown, especially since the beginning of the pandemic, in maintaining healthy, safe and stimulating living environments for all Quebec students.

If our schools have remained open since last fall and will soon reopen, unlike many places in the world, it is above all due to your dedication, your passion for our students and your great hard-working teams in your school service center, school board and schools.

Sincerely yours, Chief Executive Officers of School Service Centres, School Boards and Private Education Institutions

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Jean-François Roberge