

December 10th, 2020

Dear Parents:

We hope this finds you and your families well. It's an understatement to say that it has been a challenging fall and although we are doing a great job of taking care of students, families and each other, we know that many of you are anxious about the days and weeks to come.

In comparison with the rest of the province, we continue to do well in terms of positive COVID cases in our schools. To date we have had 24 positive cases in either staff or students where contact tracing at school has been necessary. In most cases, the contact tracing process has identified several students or staff who were in close enough proximity that it is necessary for them to self isolate, and in some cases we have sent entire classrooms home as a precaution. Overall, we have only 2 cases where Public Health believes transmission happened at school; both of these were cases where someone was unmasked and later turned out to be contagious. While this is 2 too many, it is a very small number considering the interactions that have happened between 750 school-level staff and 6500 students in the first 3 months of the school year and we are grateful for that.

The success we have had is a direct result of the commitment and hard work of Prairie South staff. Additional cleaning routines, mask rules, and restrictions on staff and student movement have made an already complex job even more difficult for staff in schools. Staff attention to these things, and their willingness to sacrifice some of the things they love about school have kept people safe in our homes and in your homes. We'd encourage each of you to speak with pride about the work we are doing together. The resilience of staff in the education sector is the only thing that is keeping the economy in Saskatchewan afloat right now, as parents are able to be in the workforce while kids are at school. While this isn't the mandate of the public school system, it is something that we should be proud of, and that we should collectively be pointing out to provincial decision-makers. We hope you will join me in thanking school staff for their commitment as the holidays approach.

Many will have seen in the news that several other school divisions in the province have had to adjust operations between now and the middle of January. We're very happy that we aren't in a situation where this is necessary for us. Our Public Health partners have confirmed that there is no need to move from our current model, and this will allow us to proceed as we have been over the last several months. As individual communities experience an increase in cases, we may need to do some adjusting, but at this point we are looking forward to a very well-deserved holiday and a return to school as planned on January 4<sup>th</sup>.

Last year we encouraged staff and families to do their best, and we continue to believe that this is important. We are concerned about the effects of the pandemic on the mental health of students and

staff. Talk to your children about how they are doing – it is important to acknowledge that each of us has been affected in some way by COVID-19, and conversation with a caring adult will help your kids to manage the strain they are experiencing. Additionally, our reading scores have dropped across the division for grades 2 and 3. During the holiday season, please take the time to read with your younger children daily for 15-20 minutes. This isn't homework – it's a way that moms and dads can show care for their children. Reading with your kids is a rare gift that doesn't cost anything and continues to pay off for a lifetime.

Please take care of yourselves and stay safe during the last few school days of 2020 and over the holiday break. Have a peaceful and safe holiday; together we're going to be okay.

Thank you,



Anthony D. (Tony) Baldwin  
Director of Education



Robert Bachmann  
Chair, Board of Education