

March 22, 2020

Ref: 218757

Dear CUPE members,

We want to thank you for your patience and understanding as government, school districts, Canadian Union of Public Employees and teachers work together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of in-school classes. We know it has been a difficult time for everyone involved. The decision to suspend in-classroom learning was made on Tuesday, March 17, under the direction of the Provincial Health Officer. This action was necessary to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of all British Columbians.

Immediately following the announcement to suspend in-classroom learning, the Ministry of Education, school districts, CUPE, the BCTF, BC School Trustees Association and all education partners began working together to determine how we can maintain the important services and supports for students, staff, families, and the school community that CUPE members provide.

We know many of you are worried about your own safety, the health of loved ones, and the wellbeing of students. We take those concerns very seriously and are working hard to address them.

Please be assured that the health and safety of CUPE members, students, and our communities is paramount in all of government's decision making. The government and school districts are working closely with public health officials to ensure that B.C. schools are safe. This includes preventative measures, including thorough cleaning protocols, good hygiene practices, and physical distancing strategies.

CUPE members are going to play a critical role to support students during this extraordinary time. As a society, we need to find ways to create a sense of normalcy, routine, and learning for children and youth. We don't fully know what that's going to look like, but the goal is to keep working to support our students.

We know many of you are concerned about what comes next at the conclusion of spring break. That is why we both wanted to update you on the plans that are currently underway across the province and provide you with information on what to expect over the weeks ahead.

First, the Ministry and K-12 education partners have convened a number of technical committees to help advise government on the path forward. This will include supporting the development of new resources and identifying and responding to emerging issues. These committees will help establish the right provincial-level guidance for districts to use in their local planning efforts.

Second, integrated guidelines for districts and schools to use in their planning are already under development. Our integrated guidelines will include information on health and safety measures, consistent with the Public Health Agency of Canada's [community-based measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19](#).

As well, in response to the many questions that have come forward since March 17, a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) has been developed and will be constantly updated as the situation changes. The FAQs will be circulated to all Boards of Education and school district staff to help inform decisions at the local level. A similar set of FAQs designed for students and their families will also be released publicly next week. Answers in these FAQs will be consistent with information provided by the Public Health Officer.

Third, CUPE, the BCTF, school districts, and the Ministry of Education are working together to strategize how we can provide the services necessary to support our students and communities in this incredible time of need. To guide those conversations the government has put forward these four guiding principles we will collectively use to inform our decisions through this time:

1. Maintain a healthy and safe environment for all students and families and all employees.
2. Provide services to support children of essential workers.
3. Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
4. Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

We know CUPE members are dedicated to the students and families you serve. Your school district will allow you time for collaborative planning when you return to work. That will include time to develop local plans to support students that are aligned with these principles and the provincial guidelines.

We know that there are many of you who are parents yourselves – and some of you may have a compromised immune system. CUPE members, like other workers, may be taking care of a loved one who is sick, or who may be self-isolating after travelling. We understand this means some of you may not be able to work at a school site and may need to work at alternate locations. We also know that it is still critical to practice physical distancing and we need find ways to do that while keeping school staff working and students learning.

We also want to assure you that as plans for continuity of learning are developed, government is continuing to fully fund all boards of education and its expectation is that pay will continue at this time for employees whose work would not otherwise have been interrupted save for the pandemic response.

We are navigating this new terrain together and we must do our best to support each other's health and well-being while continuing to support our students and their families. Do not forget that in order to help others, you need to take care of yourself and your families.

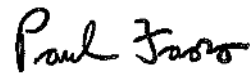
As we move forward together, we are committed to making sure you have timely information communicated to you on a regular basis. We request your patience and want to remind you that speculation can cause unnecessary stress during what is already an incredibly anxious time.

By continuing to work together in partnership we are confident we will find the way forward. This is a very challenging time in our province and around the world. Please take necessary preventative measures to keep you and your families healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Fleming". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rob" being more prominent.

Rob Fleming, Minister of Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Faoro". The signature is cursive and clearly legible.

Paul Faoro, President, CUPE BC