

Superintendent Report September 2020

Ends #1: To provide positive, safe, healthy, and inclusive learning and working environments for children, youth and staff.

Since my last report written on August 12, 2020 the focus of the management team, District staff (especially facilities, transportation, Healthy Learners Nurses and IT) has been the return of students and staff - teachers on Monday, August 31, 2020 and EA/SIW's for one day that week – these two groups total close to 2,500 employees. School Principals and Vice Principals were very engaged beginning the week of August 10, if not before, participating in virtual meetings and one meeting arranged by level with the Deputy and ADM (August 10/11). We first introduced the operational template to school leaders on August 5/6 thru a virtual meeting with Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator Clare Tooley and me. During the following weeks until the Operational Plans were due at the District level on Wednesday, August 26, 2020 there were many questions and clarifications sought. Clare provided a completed template for schools to use as a guide and made herself available to make a site visit if requested. Our Healthy Learners Nurses in each Education Centre were also supporting schools. As plans came in they were reviewed by the nurses, Clare Tooley and Director John MacDonald and feedback given on each plan. The plans were signed off by me and returned to the Principals by Friday, August 28, 2020. Last week Work Safe NB did a walk-through of two schools (Saint John High School and Glen Falls Elementary) and the reports and feedback were very positive. Thank you to the Principals and those at the District who gave support and expertise. None of us have ever written such plans before. We continue to communicate that the plans will evolve and change. Principals presented them to teachers and EAs last week and no doubt tweaks have been made already. On Thursday, September 3, 2020 all NB schools posted their Operational Plans to their websites.

Students will begin school on Tuesday, September 8 through a staggered entry and all families have been notified of the day(s) their children attend this week. This will give time to do the usual kindergarten, grade 6 and grade 9 orientation and allow all grade levels to receive age appropriate orientation. The Nurses have prepared materials for teachers to use including slides and videos.

Facilities staff and Director John MacDonald took the lead in ensuring we had all of the necessary “personal protective equipment” and supplies delivered to schools – including disinfectant, hand sanitizer, extra youth and adult face masks, face shields for school based staff, extra paper towel, floor arrows and distancing decals. Some items were ordered by EECD and some by the District. Over the summer plexiglass was installed in some schools for administrative assistants depending on their set-up. We also have tabletop plexiglass “guards” to be distributed to those at K-12 who see multiple classes during the day and feel they require additional protection. Numbers are being collected from each school. All staff and students K-12 are asked to have their own clean community masks. Cleaning supplies and protective equipment were also distributed to bus drivers including additional masks and buses are in the process of being outfitted with a plastic transparent curtain that will go around the driver as students enter/exit their bus. Bottle filling water fountains (over 200) have started to arrive and are being installed by our plumbers and a contracted company – all students are asked to have a clean water bottle. We have bottled water on site at those schools that have not yet received their fountains.

To ensure all non-teaching staff had a detailed orientation to all of the changes and expectations, numerous small group and virtual sessions were held the week of August 24 and August 31, 2020. There were 7 small group face to face sessions for drivers led by the Transportation Manager/Assistant and a Healthy Learners Nurse. A similar format was followed for custodians and District-based maintenance staff as well as the EAL (English as an Additional Language) Mentor team. Two sessions were offered

virtually for Child and Youth Team members, Subject Coordinators and Teacher Coaches, and two virtual opportunities for casual supply teachers and support staff. The supply teacher sessions included a training on Office 365 TEAMS as well. An orientation was also held for District Office staff so they understand what is happening in our schools this fall and what is different. Over the 2-week period approximately 22 orientation sessions took place and a Healthy Learners Nurse and the Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator took the lead in most presentations. The same presentation was used each time and adequate time was left for questions by staff.

Over the summer all District transportation routes (228 buses and 980 routes) were reviewed and re-drawn to meet the provincial guideline of one student per seat at K-5 (unless members of the same family) and a maximum of two students per seat at middle/high with a community mask. We received 12 additional buses from the province, so we now have 240 buses and 1,100 individual runs – our buses are now travelling 35,000 km per day across the District. We have approximately 3,200 students whose parents have opted out of transportation; however, we know some have had to re-consider and will be using busing. Each school is aware how many families will be driving their students – in some schools the number is very small and others large and discussions have been held with the Principal to ensure there is a plan communicated to parents for drop off. In some communities the police and/or the municipality have been contacted to develop a plan. Seating on the bus is assigned and buses will load from back to front in the morning. K-5 buses in heavily populated areas will be making 2-3 shuttle runs in the morning and after school given that the 65-passenger bus has only 24 riders. This means increased supervision at the schools and we are pleased that CUPE 2745 and EECD have signed an agreement permitting our EA/SIW staff to work up to an additional 1.25 hours per day to assist with supervision of students in the morning and after school. This work is offered by seniority and based on need as determined by the Principal.

The District also offers parents the opportunity to apply annually for an “alternate drop-off” afterschool and to date 2,200 of these have been processed and most have been able to be accommodated. The alternate drop off for 2020-2021 must be one consistent location and we know families have had concerns about this caveat as it is new. We have also adhered to our long-time guideline of transporting all students who live beyond 1.5 km from their school and this has meant some families not receiving transportation. In some cases, students were not entitled to busing, but there was space on the bus so they had the service provided. There are four schools in the city of Saint John where a larger number of students will not be receiving busing and a separate communication went to these families on Friday, August 21, 2020. In adhering to the 1.5 km guideline, it is important to note that there are and always will be exceptions to this as some rural roads are not safe, have high speed limits and little shoulder on which students/parents can walk. Situations brought to our attention were addressed as per our regular practice. To implement the maximum numbers on buses of 24 and 48 stops have been consolidated and some families have expressed concern.

All transportation information is available on “Bus Planner” which is found on the ASD-S website. A detailed letter went to all families on August 21 encouraging them to access the program, set up an account and register their child(ren). Shortly after and intermittently since then there have been issues with the program, and the transportation staff have been receiving a high volume of calls and emails. Additional staff are in place to help, and our Manager has been in regular communication with EECD about the program, and we apologize for the inconvenience this has caused.

ENDS #2: To demonstrate continuous improvement toward meeting provincial targets in literacy, numeracy, science and to improve learning in and application of the arts, trades and technology.

The Technology Coaches and Coordinator Darren White have been preparing introductory information for teachers to use with students on Office 365 TEAMS. This year we have increased the number of coaches from three to five given the blended learning model being used at high school. Across the province over 3,000 DELL computers were ordered by families on the provincial site and we hope they will begin to arrive this week. As students return, high school teachers will complete an inventory of which students have a laptop, those waiting for delivery and those who have not ordered. We also need to know which students do not have wi-fi or have limited connectivity. The plan is for “loaners” to be made available to those students who do not have a laptop at the beginning of the second week of school. This would follow a similar process to May 2020.

During the first week schools will identify those students who due to their health concerns or situations in their families are not able to attend school. Medical documentation will be collected – Director Peter Smith has recently participated in several virtual meetings about programming for these students. This will continue to be discussed this week. ASD-S also has a small percentage of staff who are not able to return, or who require accommodations and Director Susan Moffatt is involved with these staff.

Subject Coordinators held virtual “office hours” on September 1 and 2 to respond to curriculum questions from teachers. St. Stephen Centre will have a language monitor from Quebec this year, funded by EECD and joining us after his period of self-isolation. We welcome a small number of international teachers to St. Stephen Education Centre again this year – the number is not as large as originally expected due to the pandemic. PD has been completed for the 24 teachers delivering the new grade 4 FI curriculum and resources delivered to them. A session was also held for the 63 FI teachers who are teaching a new elementary grade level this year. Over the summer FSL Coordinators had a higher than average rate of requests for students to move from FI into the English Prime Program and we assume this could be anxiety about what the fall term may bring.

ENDS #4: To provide opportunities for staff to learn about mental health issues in children and youth and to promote school and District wide initiatives that promote mental fitness.

Education staff from the Child and Youth Teams (resource teachers, guidance, psychologists, and social workers) are now directly managed by ASD-S, whereas under the ISD agreement they were managed by the Regional Health Authority. Health and education staff continue to work together and integrate services. Consultation about a new management format with teachers on the teams will take place in the coming weeks. We will see a new management plan. The CY Teams will continue to have both Horizon Health and ASD-S members on them and will continue to provide integrated services to students and families.

On August 27, 2020, all administrators were invited to a 3-hour virtual PD session with Dr. Daniel Chorney from Halifax focused on the return to school of students, what we might expect from students and families and how to best support everyone. This was very well attended and helpful for our leaders.

Ends #6/#7: To coordinate and maximize access to resources to support youth and families. To promote the value of education through effective partnerships and positive pro-active communication.

We have since shared five letters with all families using School Messenger communicating details of the Return to School Plan, including what will be new, what families can expect, and what COVID-19 prevention measures are in place. Two of these letters were general updates, while one was regarding vulnerable students, one specific to the Operational Plans, and one responding to commonly asked health questions.

Additional information has been shared with families more specific to busing and bus safety, the Bring Your Own Device program for families of high school students, and a reminder for border communities regarding the Mandatory Isolation Order. In addition to letters home, we have been active on social media responding to questions families have about the plan and with transportation. We have created short videos for social media regarding busing, mask use and tips for families, and these have been shared on social media along with general reminders for families regarding what is new with back to school. An online bus orientation video and flip-book were created and shared with families, as was a presentation for families developed by our Healthy Learner Nurses about COVID-19. These resources are on our website.

Several of our schools, Fairvale, Saint John High School, and Sussex Corner Elementary were all featured by local news to highlight what back to school will look like in their buildings, and I was interviewed twice on CBC Information Morning, one by CTV last week and several communications with the Telegraph Journal.

A chart detailing communications forms part of this report.

OTHER UPDATES:

In late August we learned of the unexpected death of LeRoy Ryder a long-time bus driver in the Saint John Education Centre. His obituary stated that “he had said many times that being bus driver was the best job anywhere!” LeRoy was making preparations for the upcoming school year, his last before retirement.

Later in September we will begin moving thirteen staff from the Hampton Education Centre Office to the new facility leased in Hampton – the former municipal building. Space is required at Hampton Elementary School for classrooms. The five Subject Coordinators will continue at this time to be housed in the Centre.

Zoë Watson