

July 31, 2020

Hon. Gordon Wyant, Q.C.
Minister of Education
Room 361
Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina SK S4S 0B3

VIA EMAIL

Dear Minister Wyant:

RE: 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR RE-OPEN PLANNING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As the province's largest union representing over 7,000 education support workers and despite being previously regarded by you as a partner in education, we have disappointingly been left out by your government on the Education Response Planning Team reviewing the final plans at a provincial level to re-open the new school year with full in-classroom learning during this worrisome pandemic. The final review of the re-open plans from school divisions set to be announced next week leaves out the very support workers that are key to the effective and practical operations of those plans – from cleaning, to supervision, to the transportation home in the school bus.

Rushed implementation to full in-classroom learning leaves significant doubt that education staff and students will be properly protected from this coronavirus. According to the provincial guidelines for educational institutions released on June 18 from which individual school divisions based their re-open plans, it appears that staff will be left unprotected by social distancing rules. It also appears that schools across the province will re-open to full numbers without a phased-in approach to account for localized outbreaks or without adequate time to receive orientation, to prepare, and to test these so-called final plans. Two weeks before the new school year is simply not enough time to get the most important health and safety protocols right the first time to protect our lives. Furthermore, many support workers report they will not be given extra work time to prepare for this unprecedented new school year beyond the average preparation time they would typically receive.

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Many school divisions also lack the boost to school cleaning staff needed to engage in the more rigorous cleaning and sanitation regime of classrooms, washrooms, and common touch points. Indeed, school cleaning and maintenance personnel have never been more important, and yet many school divisions are left to make do without extra resources. In fact, in the Prairie South School Division, school cleaning hours are shamefully being reduced.

The province's approach to acquiring personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies for schools has also been a big concern. Individual school divisions were left to acquire supplies on their own, and while a provincial government tender was later issued, it appears the tender places the education sector as a lower priority for supplies.

Similar to the head-shaking suggestion this week that school workers should now be expected to take on the extra work of election polling stations in schools this fall, the government's planning for school re-opening is in need of a reality check from the front lines: ***we are stretched far too thin, we are being left without the safety protections needed from this coronavirus, and we are not being heard.***

While the government forges ahead with the re-open plans for all K-12 schools in September, I express to you on behalf of education support workers: ***we lack the conditions for a safe return to schools.***

The safety and welfare of our students, staff, and communities are paramount.

Yours sincerely,



Judy Henley
PRESIDENT
CUPE Saskatchewan



Jackie Christianson
CHAIR
Education Workers Steering Committee
of CUPE Saskatchewan (EWSC)

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cc: Carla Beck, MLA, Opposition Education Critic