

To:
Honourable Adrian Dix
Honourable Jennifer Whiteside

CC:
Vancouver, Surrey, Sooke, New Westminister, Burnaby Trustees
Vancouver, Surrey, Sooke, New Westminister, Burnaby superintendents
Vancouver, Surrey, Sooke, New Westminister, Burnaby MLAs

Honourable Minister Dix, Honourable Minister Whiteside

We, the undersigned District Parent Advisory Councils, represent approximately 173000 BC students. We are extremely concerned by the increase of COVID cases amongst school-aged children, especially those under the age of 10, since the return to school.

We believe the trend deserves urgent measures to protect students until vaccinations are widely available. We believe that these measures should be mandated by (and supported by funding from) the province.

Ministers, we call on you to immediately implement the following:

Mask mandate for students from Kindergarten to Grade 3

We believe that younger students deserve the same protections from COVID as older students as masks are an effective safety measure to stop students from breathing in the virus, which we now know is airborne. We believe the existing mask mandate should be extended to younger children, with accommodations for those students who are unable to wear them for medical reasons.

Limits on gatherings for younger students

We believe that assemblies and large gatherings including children ineligible for vaccinations should be banned for now. We believe that learning cohorts did work in the Elementary School setting. We ask that cohorts be re-established for all Elementary Schools.

Enhanced contact tracing

Classroom teachers understand the student interactions in their classrooms. To ensure complete identification of chains of transmission, we believe that teachers should be involved in contact tracing efforts.

Comprehensive testing

Given the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant, we believe that rapid testing of students is an important tool for identifying and breaking chains of transmission. We ask that this government introduce rapid testing until vaccines are made available to younger children.

Vaccine mandate for teachers and school staff

We believe that a vaccine mandate for all teachers and staff will improve the safety of all students and members of the school community. We are aligned with teachers in this request, and we urge the government to quickly work with stakeholders to resolve issues around privacy and accommodations.

Stronger mask mandate for teachers and school staff

In lieu of a vaccine mandate for teachers and school staff, we believe that there should be fewer exceptions for mask wearing in classroom settings. Plexiglass barriers are insufficient to protect classrooms of potentially unvaccinated students.

Vaccination status for parents/caregivers entering school for non-essential matters

Opening up schools to unvaccinated guests and volunteers increases the risk to our children. For this reason, we ask that all guests and volunteers entering the school for non-essential matters should require proof of vaccination.

Exposure notifications

We are pleased that the government recognizes the importance of exposure notifications to parents in making informed choices for their families. We believe that given the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant, exposure notifications should prioritize speed and specificity so that parents can take immediate action. Exposure notifications should take less than five days.

Ventilation

The provincial government has provided funding to schools for ventilation upgrades, however this information is not widely accessible to the public. We ask that the government mandate districts to provide detailed information about ventilation systems on a school by school basis, including information on filtration and air exchanges/hour. We also ask that the government implement regular and frequent independent audits of School District exposure control plans to confirm compliance, with follow-up action in a timely manner.

Remote Learning

We ask that supports be provided to districts with a high number of exposures to allow for additional remote learning and hybrid options.

In closing, our organizations are asking for stronger minimum requirements to protect our children given the rapid increase in COVID cases since the return to school.

Thank you,
Rina Diaz, president (Surrey DPAC)
Gord Lau, chair (Vancouver DPAC)
Melissa Da Silva (Sooke, SPEAC)
Kathleen Carlsen (New Westminster DPAC)
Ashley Sandquist (Burnaby DPAC)