



RETURN-TO-SCHOOL GUIDE

September 2021



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Message from the Director of Education

The Limestone District School Board will begin the 2021-2022 school year on September 7, 2021, the third school year impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is much excitement for students to return to in-person learning. We are cautiously optimistic that we will have a better school year with a return to several more typical school activities.

Staff have been planning for the new school year since the spring. We began to refine school and district-based plans based on preliminary Ministry of Education guidance provided in May as well as its more recent [COVID-19: Health safety and operational guidance for schools \(2021-2022\)](#). We also continue to meet regularly with KFL&A Public Health and other community partners to prepare as best we can. While much work has been done, undoubtedly, there will be further updates as the year proceeds. Remaining flexible will continue to be critical and I thank you in advance for your ongoing patience and understanding.

I want to remind everyone that the best indicator for the health of our schools is the health of our larger community in KFL&A. Local community health circumstances directly impacted Limestone schools last year and will continue to be the primary indicator of how schools will respond to the pandemic's impact in 2021-2022. As a community, we must continue to work together to ensure schools remain safe and open. Schools provide much more than learning for the youngest members of the community. Thankfully, based on statements from local Public Health authorities related to local

vaccination rates and low case counts, we are well positioned to open schools safely. Please read this [joint statement from the Medical Officers of Health](#) from KFL&A Public Health and Hastings, Prince Edward Public Health.

We remain committed to regular, timely and transparent communications with families, students, staff, labour partners, Trustees and community members surrounding the return to school. The board and school administrators will communicate regularly with families and students over the next several weeks using a variety of methods to reach all households. Information and updates will be shared through, but not limited to, the board website, social media channels, mobile app, local media outlets, and direct communication to families using the Communicate broadcast tool.



The information provided in this guide is intended to consolidate our return-to-school planning and help prepare families and students for back to school. The guide follows direction from the Ministry of Education, Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and KFL&A Public Health with some amendments based on local circumstances and decisions. It is important to note that protocols may change based on local experience and data and the most up-to-date information will be shared on the board's [Return to School webpages](#).

I would like to thank students, families, staff and our broader school communities for their past and future efforts to help us support students as best we can through these ever-evolving circumstances. We have overcome significant obstacles in the last two school years, and undoubtedly our collective efforts will be required to surmount any potential challenges that lie ahead. We appreciate your continued resilience and support.

Krishna Burra, Director of Education

School Routines

The board continues to work closely with KFL&A Public Health to support a return to some school routines using multiple strategies and a layering of controls to support safe and healthy environments for students and staff. It is important to note that school-day routines and protocols may differ from school to school and may change based on local experience and data.

School Arrival: Students may not arrive or be dropped off at the school until 15 minutes before the first bell/period 1 (this will vary from school to school). Elementary yard supervision does not begin until 15 minutes before the school's first bell of the day. Secondary students who walk, drive themselves or are dropped off must use the appropriate entry designated for their use.

Students who ride a bus that arrives at school with more than 15 minutes before class will proceed to their period 1 class. Schools will use all possible doors for entry and exit to the school. Schools will create designated routes for students to get to and from classrooms at the beginning and the end of the day, and the use of entry/exit doors that are closest to the class to minimize movement in hallways. Appropriate directional signage will be used to assist with the movement of students and staff. Hand sanitizer will be required to be used by students when they enter and exit the school and classrooms.



Lunch/nutrition breaks: Schools will develop site-specific plans, which may vary due to school size, location, and physical space. All students must remain masked indoors unless eating.

Elementary students will continue to eat in their classrooms. Secondary schools may allow students to use school cafeterias providing a minimum distance of two metres is maintained between cohorts.



This will be determined on a school-by-school basis. Food service will not be available in secondary cafeterias to begin the school year. Secondary students are permitted to eat off-campus.

Elementary recess: Students may remove their masks outdoors. As a precaution, elementary students will stay within their cohort during recess and breaks outdoors. Students are permitted to use shared materials outdoors with appropriate hand hygiene.

Secondary breaks: Students may remove their masks outdoors. Students do not need to remain in class cohorts but distancing will be encouraged as much as possible.

Lockers/cubbies: Lockers and cubbies are permitted. Lockers will be gradually distributed after school starts. Schools will stagger entry and use of these spaces to promote as much physical distancing as possible. Students will be asked not to congregate at lockers and to clean their hands after use.

Assemblies: As a precaution, schools will not be organizing larger indoor gatherings in the school to start the school year. This may be revisited at a later date. If assemblies eventually do occur, students would remain in their class cohort and students would be masked.

Extra-curriculars: Schools may choose to offer extra-curriculars. There are, however, several safety measures which will vary from activity to activity and school to school based on its individual circumstances. Schools will share more information about these with students and families directly.

Learning Models

Elementary In-Person Learning Model:

Elementary school students in Kindergarten through Grade 8 will attend school five days per week remaining in one cohort for the full day where possible. Students will receive 300 minutes of instruction per day. Students may be placed into small groups (for example special education support, English-language learning) with students from other cohorts.

Students may use common school spaces such as libraries and gymnasiums. Specialized education staff and teachers, such as French teachers or education support staff are permitted to go into classrooms, and multiple schools to provide programming for students. Schools will develop site-specific plans, which may vary due to school size, location, and physical space.

Secondary In-Person Learning Model:

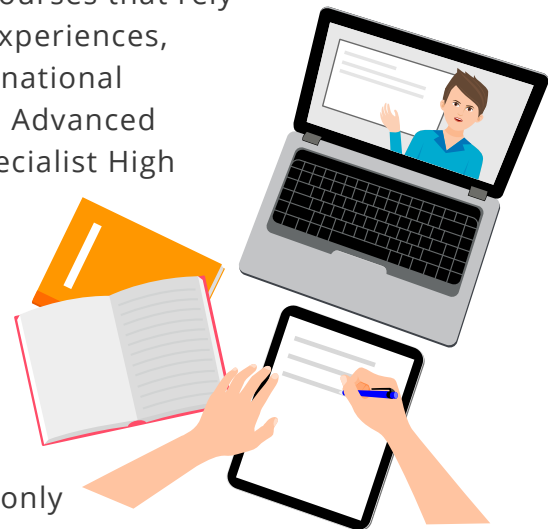
For the fall semester, school boards have been instructed to timetable students with no more than two courses at a time (also known as a quadmester) to preserve the option of reverting to more restrictive measures, if needed. The secondary quadmester model is organized as two “quads” during semester 1 (September 2021 to January 2022) with students attending two classes per day (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) during the first quad, and then two new classes in the second quad.



Virtual School:

Elementary (K to Grade 8): Students entering Kindergarten to Grade 8 who opt for Virtual School, will be provided with a combination of whole class instruction, guided instruction, individual support and “office hours” for each full-time assignment. Core French programming will be available to students in Grades 4 to 8 only. Due to staffing constraints, Choices at 7 programs and French Immersion programming will only be offered at in-person school.

Secondary (Grades 9-12): Students in Grades 9 to 12 will also follow the quadmester model. Like in-person school, course demand will determine which courses run. Courses that rely on hands-on experiences, including International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, Specialist High Skills Major, co-operative education, technology, art, and physical and health education will only be offered in-person.



For more information on the 2021-2022 Virtual School, please visit the [board website](#).

Changes to Models (due to outbreaks): It may become necessary to switch from in-person learning to a remote/virtual model if the status of COVID-19 changes in a class or in our region. If this occurs, staff would work with students at the start of the school year to determine current needs to prepare for continuity of learning should it be required.

Safety Protocols

Schools will use multiple safety protocols to support healthier and safer environments for students and staff and minimize the spread of COVID-19. There is not one specific measure that will prevent transmission from occurring in schools. There are several strategies that when used together will help reduce the risk of infection to in-person attendees. These protocols include:

Screening: All staff and students must self-screen for symptoms of COVID-19 every day before attending school. All staff and students who are experiencing symptoms must not attend school and should follow the guidance provided in the screening tool, which may include seeking appropriate medical attention as required, and/or getting tested.

Confirmation of screening: The Ministry of Education may direct schools to perform confirmation of self-screening during a period of potential higher transmission (for example, after a holiday period).

Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:

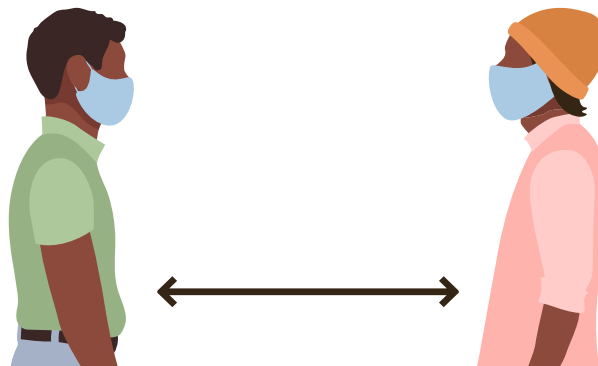
Schools will train students on appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, including the use of alcohol-based hand rub and reinforce its use. Hand hygiene should be conducted by anyone entering the school and incorporated into the daily schedule at regular intervals during the day, above and beyond what is usually recommended (for example, before eating food, after using the washroom).



Masking: Students in Grades 1 to 12 and all staff are required to wear properly fitted masks indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes, as well as on school vehicles unless there is a necessary medical or special needs exemption that would prevent them from wearing a mask. Kindergarten students are expected and encouraged to wear masks. Masks may be temporarily removed indoors for eating and drinking. Physical distancing should be maintained wherever possible. Students and staff are not required to wear masks outdoors, but distancing will be encouraged as much as possible. School visitors (including families) are required to wear a medical mask while on school premises. Medical masks will be provided if needed.



Staff personal protective equipment (PPE): Staff will continue to have use of required PPE, including medical masks (surgical/procedural), eye protection and other items based on their specific role/job functions (for example, gloves, gowns).



Physical Distancing: Where possible, physical distancing should be maintained. Student movement will be staggered where possible to limit student congregation in hallways. Students do not need to stay within their cohort during recess and breaks outdoors, but distancing will be encouraged between cohorts as much as possible.

Safety Protocols

Cleaning: The board will continue enhanced cleaning protocols as identified by KFL&A Public Health as a key consideration to help minimize risk. The board will continue to use asthma-safe, hospital-grade, green-based cleaning products where available. Scent-free products continue to be recommended for cleaning. Custodial staff will perform routine cleaning of general facilities through the day and will conduct enhanced cleaning of high-touch surfaces twice daily.



Ventilation: School ventilation systems in all LDSB schools have been inspected and are in good working order. All classrooms will have filtered, mechanical ventilation through existing or upgraded HVAC systems or stand-alone HEPA air filtration units. Schools with mechanical units will be closely monitored and filters changed on a frequent basis to ensure classrooms and other learning spaces are changing the air (cleaning through filtering). Classrooms that do not have filtered air will have HEPA Air Purification unit(s) installed to ensure the air is changed frequently. All Kindergarten classrooms will have HEPA Air Purification units. Information on school ventilation systems is available on the [board website](#).



Vaccination: Public Health indicates that vaccination remains the best way to protect students, staff and the community from COVID-19. Benefits of getting fully immunized (two doses plus 14 days) against COVID-19:



- Vaccine helps your immune system to fight the COVID-19 virus and reduces the chance of serious illness and hospitalization.
- Vaccine creates a strong antibody response in youth aged 12 to 17 and is up to 95% effective after two doses.
- Symptom-free contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19 are not required to isolate if they are fully immunized.
- Symptom-free household members of symptomatic individuals are not required to isolate if they are fully immunized.

Public Health may recommend COVID-19 testing for fully immunized students if they were a high-risk contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19.

School Protocols: KFL&A Public Health is the lead health agency in our district for managing COVID-19 cases, including providing guidance to schools on confirming and controlling outbreaks based on local circumstances and data, and provincial public health directives. Public health has produced standard [school protocols](#) to help families understand what happens if students develop COVID-19 symptoms at school; what happens if a student requires testing for COVID-19; what happens if a student tests positive for COVID-19; and what happens if an outbreak of COVID-19 is declared. Public Health has also created a Family Guide with important information on what families can do to help keep schools safe.



Mental Health & Special Education Supports

Mental Health Supports:

Ensuring the mental health and well-being of students and staff remains a priority. We recognize that the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 bring additional challenges and stress to returning to school. While many students and families are eager to return to a “more normal” school experience, some will be worried about starting back, and what this new school year will look like. Whether your student is engaging in-person or remote learning, we are committed to meet every learner where they are and create a positive strength-based return to school. School-based mental health supports will continue to include access to Student Support Counsellors, Adolescent Care Workers, Attendance Counsellors and Social Workers. School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) is providing school boards, educators and families with comprehensive back-to-school resources which can be customized to address local priorities. Families are encouraged to review wellness resources and supports on the [board website](#) and [SMHO's Mentally Healthy Back to School Support Package](#).



Special Education Supports:

The board is committed to supporting students who require special education supports and services to successfully engage in learning. Staff will continue to work with families to ensure a smooth transition back to in-person learning or virtual school learning if this option has been chosen. The board's Educational Services staff will continue to work with school staff and community partners to ensure that innovative supports and services are in place to meet a range of special education needs.

Transportation

Busing will be offered in September and safety protocols that were in place last year will continue.

All riders in Grades 1 to 12 and adults will be required to wear masks unless a medical exemption exists. Kindergarten students are encouraged to wear masks if possible. Riders will be assigned seats to assist with contact tracing should it be required. Buses will be cleaned according to KFL&A Public Health guidelines.

Tri-Board Student Transportation has indicated there may be bus delays and cancellations due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Families should have a backup plan to transport their student(s) to school, and to arrange child care where required, if their bus is cancelled for any reason and they cannot transport their student to school. Families are encouraged to visit the [Tri-Board website](#) to sign up to receive direct notifications, download Tri-Board's app or access Tri-Board's Twitter account.

