

Plan for APSEA Field-Based Staff Return to Work September 2020

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Introduction

The well-being, health, and safety of children, youth and staff are top priorities for the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) as schools across the Atlantic region re-open in September 2020.

The Plan for APSEA Field-Based Staff Return to Work document presents APSEA's expectations and standards for the safe operation of provincial services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been based upon the directives and plans outlined by Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development/Lifelong Learning of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

APSEA is working with all four Atlantic Provinces and will continue to engage our educational partners as part of the re-entry to school process. APSEA will also seek guidance from provincial Public Health officers and agencies for information as required; adjustments may be required given the evolving nature of this pandemic.

APSEA is working collaboratively with provincial departments, school districts/regions/boards and schools to support students and school teams. Continued focus will be placed on ensuring consistent and transparent communication and a commitment to continued support and services for the children and youth, school teams and families with whom APSEA works. For the 2020 – 2021 school year, APSEA commits to providing services to support student learning while ensuring health and safety measures reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

This document provides guidance for APSEA staff while allowing for some local flexibility, recognizing that each school and student plan is individualized. This plan outlines three scenarios for learning and instruction for the 2020 – 2021 school year, depending on the status of COVID-19. APSEA services in schools, early learning centres/daycares, and homes may vary across the provinces, regions/districts/boards, dependent upon the local COVID-19 status.

The three main priorities informing the plan are:

- **Maintaining a healthy and safe environment for all children and youth, families, and employees;**
- **Reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19**
- **Supporting all children and youth who are blind or visually impaired and/or Deaf or hard of hearing by providing continuity of educational opportunities**

Key Health Information to Minimize Risks

There are measures that APSEA staff can take to reduce the risk of transmission of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. Such measures include, but are not limited to, physical distancing, hand hygiene and use of masks, respiratory etiquette, increased frequency of cleaning and disinfection and having staff stay home when ill. These are important steps that can support the health and wellness of our students, staff and communities.

It is important to remember that there is not a reliance on one single public health measure to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the school setting. The risk of a COVID-19 outbreak is less likely the more public health measures are implemented and adhered to. Reducing the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in schools will require the dedication and support of all APSEA staff. However, an increase in cases of COVID-19 is possible upon the resumption of school. It is therefore important that appropriate measures are proactively put in place to mitigate the effects of such an increase.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing (2 metre spacing) is a useful public health measure to help prevent the spread of disease; however, in a controlled school environment, where 2 metres is not possible between desks in assigned workspaces, the greatest possible spacing is recommended. In situations where physical distancing is not possible, extra emphasis on hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, not participating when sick, and cleaning and disinfecting workspaces on a regular basis before and after activities is strongly recommended.

Hand and Respiratory Hygiene

Staff must wash their hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum alcohol concentration of 60% can be used.

Staff must wash their hands frequently with soap and water, especially:

- On arrival
- Before and after meals
- After using the toilet
- After blowing nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After handling shared toys, communal items or learning materials

Staff should practise cough etiquette by coughing and sneezing into their sleeve or a tissue and discard it immediately. Staff should avoid sharing personal items. Staff should also avoid touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

Environmental Cleaning

Increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces is significant in controlling the spread of viruses. It is important that staff use the right product for the right purpose.

Shared materials or items that students and staff may communally use must be cleaned and sanitized between uses by a staff member, such as shared teaching materials, toys, and assessment tools. If this is not possible the material in question should not be made available for common use.

Staff are to request cleaning and disinfecting supplies from their Supervisor.

Managing Symptoms of COVID-19

Before leaving home, staff must self-screen for symptoms each day that they enter a school. Those who are sick with symptoms consistent with possible COVID-19 infection must stay home, contact 811, and cannot return until fully recovered. If tested, Public Health will inform the individual when isolation may be lifted.

During work hours, if an individual develops symptoms consistent with possible COVID-19 infection while at work, they should immediately wash their hands, report their symptoms to their immediate Supervisor, avoid contact with other staff, children and families and follow the Public Health Guidelines in their respective province.

Use of Masks

Within the context of kindergarten/primary-12 education, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is primarily focused on non-medical masks. Practices such as physical distancing, hand washing, staying home when sick, and increased environmental cleaning continue to be priority public health measures. Wearing a mask alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19. Staff must consistently and strictly adhere to good hygiene and Public Health measures, including frequent hand washing and physical distancing. When worn properly, a community mask can reduce the spread of infectious respiratory droplets.

In general, masks should not be required for APSEA staff if physical distancing is possible and is practiced appropriately. However, APSEA staff should follow the protocols from the provinces in which they work with regards to wearing masks. It is acknowledged that some staff may choose to regularly wear masks. This is a personal choice and should not be discouraged. Reusable clear view masks (to be washed at home by staff) will be provided by APSEA.

Some students who are blind/visually impaired and/or Deaf/hard of hearing or other needs may require staff to be in close proximity. The need for personal protective equipment may be considered and determined to be necessary on an individual basis.

Scenarios for the 2020 – 2021 School Year

APSEA staff will follow the educational plans and procedures of the local district/region/board. The following outlines considerations for APSEA staff within each scenario.

Scenario 1: In-School Supports

- **Regular in-class instruction resumes for Kindergarten/primary -12 students**
- **Teachers and other staff who travel between schools and have contact with students will have additional protocols, including an activity log. See Appendix A: Staff Contact Log. Districts/regions/boards may limit the number of schools that these employees visit**
- **APSEA staff must follow Public Health measures for student learning including physical distancing when possible**
- **Virtual learning or other forms of structured learning must be put in place for students who are required to stay home because they are sick or in isolation due to COVID-19 infection or exposure.**
- **For activity planning, staff should ask themselves the following questions to determine the risk of the activities and whether they are allowed to proceed:**
 - **Does the activity involve shared surfaces or objects frequently touched by hands?**
 - **Can an activity be modified to increase opportunities for physical distancing?**
 - **What is the frequency/possibility to clean high-touch surfaces (e.g., electronic devices, instruments, equipment, toys)?**

Scenario 2: A Combination of In School Support, Telepractice and At-Home Learning

- **Priority for in-class instruction to the extent possible**
- **Teachers and other staff who travel between schools and have contact with students will have additional protocols, including an activity log. See Appendix A: Staff Contact Log. Districts/regions/boards may limit the number of schools that these employees visit**
- **For activity planning, staff should ask themselves the following questions to determine the risk of the activities and whether they are allowed to proceed:**
 - **Does the activity involve shared surfaces or objects frequently touched by hands?**
 - **Can an activity be modified to increase opportunities for physical distancing?**
 - **What is the frequency/possibility to clean high-touch surfaces (e.g., electronic devices, instruments, equipment, toys)?**
- **APSEA staff must follow Public Health measures for student learning including physical distancing when possible.**
- **Telepractice and At-home learning will be offered in a balanced approached when required involving coordination and planning with the school team**
- **Staff will be required to ensure children and youth at home have learning materials and relevant resources or are receiving direct teaching online.**
- **In circumstances in which supports and services require support and adaptation to comply with public health measures, plans must be developed to ensure their inclusion.**

Scenario 3: Telepractice and At-Home Learning

- **Telepractice instruction and At-home learning opportunities are offered to children and youth. The expectation is that teaching and assessment of outcomes will continue. As such, staff may be required to be in attendance at school, unless that school has been ordered closed by public health. This will be organized with coordination and planning with the school team.**
- **To the extent possible, staff must consider and enable the full participation and inclusion of students within the virtual school environment.**

Early Childhood Services: Early Childhood Centres/Daycare Settings

Individualized services designed to meet the needs of the child and family create an optimal language-learning environment for the child. The decision to allow in-person intervention between children, parents and APSEA staff in early childhood/ daycare settings is made in consultation with the parents, the early childhood/daycare staff and the APSEA staff member and is documented in the child's file.

Telepractice services are preferred to replace home visits in order to reduce the risk of transmission. Should telepractice not be possible, a community setting such as school space and/or early learning and childcare facilities may be offered as an option. It is important to note that restrictions to any visits may be applied if Public Health restrictions are increased again due to increased threat of COVID-19 spread. For some situations where either of these options may not be possible, staff will discuss other options with their Supervisor.

The nature of these services in daycare or community settings may make it difficult to maintain physical distancing. Staff must maintain physical distancing whenever possible and must minimize risk of exposure and transmission while maintaining the ability to provide effective support and services. When the physical distancing is not feasible, staff must wear a face mask.

Planning for Early Childhood Services

- Ongoing telepractice services will minimize risk for all.
- Work with the staff at the facility where service is provided to set up the environment to reduce exposure.
- Ensure mask and alcohol-based hand sanitizer are available during the visit.
- Plan a response if someone begins to display symptoms during the visit or is symptomatic on arrival. If any concerns for the health or safety of any individual arise during the visit, the visit should be ended without delay. The staff member should notify and consult with their Supervisor.
- Out of an abundance of caution to reduce the overall risk of transmission, the wearing of a face mask will be strongly recommended when it is not feasible to ensure physical distancing measures. This will not apply to individuals who cannot do so due to health issues.
- Use strategies to help children become accustomed to staff wearing masks.
- Children are not required to wear masks during the visit.

Records

- Staff are required to maintain a log of names and locations. This will facilitate contact tracing by Public Health if a COVID-19 case was found in work locations or in staff. See Appendix A: Staff Contact Log.

Work Refusals

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act staff have the right to refuse to perform work if they hold a bona fide belief a “physical condition” in the workplace constitutes a risk to their health or safety. Please discuss your concerns with your manager or the Coordinator of Human Resources.

Communication

The success of the return to work plan will depend in part on families being informed about new protocols and confident that the approach will keep their children safe. To that end, APSEA staff should remain in contact with the school /early childhood centre/daycare teams and families to ensure clear communication of expectations and learning opportunities early in September and ongoing throughout the year. Communication strategies should include:

- **Prioritizing digital communications, such as fact sheets explaining new learning opportunities and links to helpful information**
- **Providing age-appropriate information for students related to telepractice and at-home learning, and resources to support learning and wellness at home.**
- **Staff should work in collaboration with school/early childhood centre/daycare teams to ensure their work aligns with the operational plans of the school/centres**

Staff Support

Supervisors will develop a Frequently Asked Questions document for their staff, addressing and clarifying the measures outlined in this document. Staff will manage daily operations to reduce the risk of transmission during intervention. This document has been adapted from the directives and plans outlined by Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development/Lifelong Learning of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. APSEA will continue to work closely with the Atlantic Provinces and educational partners to ensure sustained alignment with provincial plans, operational policies and public health measures to ensure that safety and well-being for all staff and the children, youth and families we serve.

APSEA would like to acknowledge the four Atlantic Provinces for sharing their COVID-19 planning documents.

Appendix A: Staff Contact Log

Staff Contact Log

Name of employee: _____

	Date	Site location and name of persons present in the intervention space	Contact Information (address, e-mail address, telephone number)
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			