

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS— REPORT ON MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DISCUSSIONS

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The regularly scheduled call with the Deputy Minister (DM) of Education took place yesterday.

School Reopening

The DM indicated that the entire system continues to focus primarily on schools reopening and she reviewed briefly the latest memos sent out, but did not provide additional information about them.

The general secretaries of the education affiliates asked questions about cohorting at the secondary and elementary levels. The DM and Assistant DM indicated that it was a priority and that school boards were respecting the 100-student guidance provided by the Ministry for the secondary panel. At the elementary panel, the guidance provided is for 50 students, which will be a challenge. They drew a distinction between direct and indirect contact. We raised safety and logistical issues around elementary cohorting especially for staff that have to visit multiple classrooms. They indicated that they were working with boards on those issues.

The general secretaries asked questions about the additional funding announced for boards without reserves. The Assistant DM explained that there are a small number of school boards in that predicament and the Ministry will provide up to two per cent of their operating funding from the 11 million that they have allocated.

Virtual/Distance Learning

We asked questions around distance learning and, in particular, if the planning surrounding distance learning is being left to boards, and what the impact will be on funding. The DM explained that there is a “surprising” interest in distance learning and that they have been working with school boards to establish their plans, which may include putting students in a virtual environment where they may not have the same teacher as the students who are physically in the school. They added that a Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) sent to school boards stated that teachers needed to have a place to work and access to technology to run these virtual classes.

We asked if this is occurring board by board or if there was contemplation of aggregating to another agency outside of school boards. The DM responded that there was “no” contemplation of involving outside agencies. She added that they were concerned with the ability of smaller

boards to put the necessary infrastructure in place but that, even there, they were reassured small boards could manage it, and that it made sense to keep students within a board given familiarity and other factors. She stated that it made sense to operate with the principle of keeping students within a given school board. We expressed concern that there could potentially be “leakage” of students beyond a given school board and that we would be extremely concerned if students went to an outside, non-school board agency. They stated that they appreciated our position as a fundamental principle.

Other Ministry/Affiliate Workgroups

With respect to the other workgroups, the vast majority have not been meeting. They responded to a question raised in the affiliate workgroup with respect to access to the mandatory health and safety training for occasional teachers and casual workers. The Ministry confirmed that occasional/casual workers would have access to the professional development day being planned.

Redeployment

Ministry staff provided an update on redeployment and indicated that more than 900 volunteers had signed up. Very few volunteers were redeployed to support other sectors, such as long-term care facilities. The emergency orders will run until the end of August but will not be into September and therefore the program wrap up.