



Surrey District  
Parents Advisory Council (DPAC)  
Strengthening PACs & Empowering Parents

Open Letter to the Minister of Education, Mr. Rob Fleming

Re: K-12 Restart Plan 2020

Dear Mr. Fleming,

Surrey DPAC is the parent voice representing the largest district in the Province. Surrey is home to more than 74,000 students, approximately 13% of the provincial student population. With the previous Government, our district dealt with many issues regarding funding, deteriorating school buildings, and overcrowding. Today we find ourselves having to deal with the inability of this Government to deliver

educational options that meet the needs of our families during a pandemic.

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*“Physical distancing has been the most effective part of B.C.’s infection management,”*  
- Rob Fleming, June 2020

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Since the cancellation of classes back in March, our families have been patient and flexible. We have done our part by adhering to Dr. Henry’s recommendations with physical distancing and keeping our bubbles small.

Since June, our families have been waiting anxiously for B.C.’s Back to School Plan. On July 29, you delivered a framework for Districts and Boards of Education for September. However, that framework did not include hybrid or remote learning as an option, which our district desperately needs.

As of today, our parents only have the option to return to overcrowded schools as per our district plan or choose an alternative such as homeschooling. Distributed learning is no longer an option, as our district is reporting that they are at full capacity.

What we need is the option AND funding for our district to create a remote learning option for our families that do not wish to return to school due to COVID-19 concerns. This program needs to be flexible to allow students to remain enrolled in their current school while they attend online learning (like Calgary’s return to school plan) and once safe to do so, transfer back to in-class instruction.

Providing our families with this option would in fact alleviate the overcrowding crisis we are facing right now and would allow for proper physical distancing. Remote learning would also allow our families that wish to remain at home the opportunity to do so without the risk or fear of exposing their loved ones. Surrey is home to large families that have both students and elders/seniors with immunocompromised systems.

Our families agree that the education of our children needs to continue, but we also agree that it is not worth more than the safety of our families. The mixed messages coming from Dr. Henry and B.C.'s Back to School Plan are extremely confusing when it comes to the rules in place for our schools.

Our understanding is that there are two sets of rules, one set for our schools and one set for the public. Our rules need to be the same. We are having trouble understanding how a family cannot host a family gathering (Surrey is home to large families of 20+) but our children can sit for long periods of time in a room of 30. A small room that does not allow for physical distance. 30 people outside of a family bubble not wearing masks. Then, they can go and interact with another 30 in their cohort. If a staff member that moves around learning groups comes into our children's learning group, that exposure number of 60 is doubled.

**Minister Fleming, we call on you to immediately implement the following to the stated back to school plan:**

- 1. Provide an option AND funding for our district to create a hybrid/remote learning plan for our families that do not wish to return to school due to COVID-19 concerns. This program needs to be flexible to allow students to remain enrolled in their current school while they attend online learning (like Calgary's return to school plan) and once safe to do so, transfer back to in-class instruction.**
- 2. Mandate mask use whenever physical distancing is not possible for staff and students in classrooms, labs, and libraries—not just in common spaces like hallways—except for medical reasons.**

Data collected in a parent survey, from 3,452 respondents, results indicate that the vast majority of our families are experiencing significant anxiety and stress. 54% indicated that they will return to school reluctantly as they feel it is their only choice, while only 19% of our families are confident in the current plan.

When we asked about masks, 61% felt that these should be mandatory for all both student and staff in any space, while only 13% agreed that the current plan was enough.

We know a hybrid or remote learning option would work for our families, as 45% of our respondents said the model used back in June worked for their families, while 38% agreed it worked but was not sustainable.

We understand the evidence that children are at a lower risk of developing and transmitting COVID-19, as clearly outlined in your plan, but that small possibility is still there. In a region where numbers are the highest currently at 2572 cases, 85 deaths, it would be unwise to pack the schools to full capacity. Especially, when we have 142 cases of 10-19-year-old and 86 cases under 10 years old. COVID-19 spreads like the flu, and children are the main spreaders of flu infections.

That is why we need you to understand the anxiety and stress we are facing. We need you to understand that for some of our families, this means playing a game of Russian Roulette with the lives of their loved ones.

This virus has been spreading since late 2019. That means we are closing in on a year of living in a pandemic with no vaccine and no end in sight. Our families continue to sacrifice many things. Please do not leave our families with the alternative to choose to sacrifice their loved ones for the sake of their children's education.

Sincerely,

Rina Diaz | President



*Strengthening PACs & Empowering Parents*

**Surrey District 36 Parent Advisory Council (Surrey DPAC)**

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