



Box 809 • 121 Collins Street  
Warman SK CAN • S0K 4S0  
Phone: 306-683-2800  
Fax: 306-934-8221  
www.spiritsd.ca

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Dear Prairie Spirit families:

The purpose of this letter is to connect with families as we continue to plan for the start of the 2021/22 school year. As the new Director of Education for Prairie Spirit School Division, I am pleased to provide this update. In Prairie Spirit, we are optimistic and excited to start the new school year where we can learn together, support one another, challenge one another and celebrate our learning.

As a Division, we follow the advice and recommendations of the local Medical Health Officers (MHO) and our provincial government. Public Health strongly recommends mask wearing for all students and staff at this time. The provincial government provided an [update](#) for COVID-19 precautions on August 20. Prairie Spirit will continue to have the support and guidance of the local MHO in responding to public health risks in school settings.

When school resumes on Wednesday, September 1, all Prairie Spirit schools will offer in-class, daily learning. Prairie Spirit schools will have several safety protocols in place to reduce the possible transmission of COVID-19. This is of particular concern for our youngest students who are not eligible to be vaccinated, with the spread of the Delta variant causing a resurgence in cases. Our focus continues to be on the safety and well-being of students and staff members.

***Please note: Safety measures may change at any time with short notice, depending on the local situation.***

### **Vaccination**

All eligible Saskatchewan residents are encouraged to get vaccinated. The Saskatchewan Health Authority will offer school-based vaccination clinics similar to those offered at the end of the last school year. In addition, any individuals turning 12 in the current year are immediately eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination.

### **Masks**

At this time, **masks will be required for elementary students (those students born in 2010 and later) and elementary staff in all Prairie Spirit schools.** This will also apply to any older students who are in the same cohort as students who are required to wear a mask. The provincial government announced last week that all students born in 2009 are now eligible to be vaccinated, regardless of their birth date.

Students and bus drivers will be required to wear masks while on a Prairie Spirit school bus since buses transport students from different grades and other schools, in some cases.

For outdoor activities such as recess or outdoor gym classes, there is no recommendation for students to mask.

### **Illness at school**

If students or staff members have COVID-19 symptoms, they are expected to stay home. Although this has been emphasized during the pandemic, it has always been a strong practice and expectation. Parents should continue to screen their children for COVID-19 symptoms before sending them to school.

### **Contact tracing**

The Saskatchewan Health Authority plans to continue to do contact tracing when there is a case in a school. The provincial government has indicated there will be a rapid testing pilot program offered to families through their schools. More information will be provided once it is shared with school divisions.

### **Back to school events**

At this time, we have asked schools to hold off on planning back to school gatherings (e.g., Welcome Back BBQ, school assemblies, etc.) until we see what the start of the school year looks like. We want to ensure we are being careful and mindful of the risks involved in a large group gathering. We will revisit our gathering guidelines in the coming weeks.

### **Extra-curricular activities**

We are currently planning for a return to extra-curricular activities. Schools will be sharing information about these activities with students.

### **Transportation**

Our buses will continue to be cleaned and sanitized according to pandemic expectations. Buses will continue to follow assigned seating plans this fall.

### **Water bottle filling stations**

Each Prairie Spirit school has water bottle filling stations. These will continue to be available for students and regular water fountains will remain closed.

### **Cleaning and hand hygiene**

We will continue to follow the required cleaning and sanitization practices in all Prairie Spirit facilities. All students, staff and visitors will be expected to follow established hand hygiene practices, with hand sanitizer available throughout schools and offices.

### **Classroom activities**

Students may work together in groups in classroom activities. Students may share toys and other supplies, with good hand hygiene before and after activities.

### **Cohorting**

Schools are asked to keep students in their cohorts throughout the school day, as much as possible. Block scheduling is in place for all Prairie Spirit high school students this fall.

### **School ventilation**

All mechanical equipment in Prairie Spirit schools and offices is well-maintained and readied for operation. Prairie Spirit has consulted with industry experts to ensure our systems maximize outside

fresh air into the buildings. In addition to opening windows whenever possible, the Division has focused on increasing fresh air through mechanical ductwork. The Division uses filters with the maximum filtration possible in each school. Several schools in the Division are currently receiving significant mechanical upgrades as a result of provincial stimulus funding.

**Visitors in schools**

Parents, community coaches and other guests will be able to access the school building this year, following a personal pre-screening for symptoms and with masking required. A decision will be made regarding welcoming parent volunteers in schools in the coming weeks.

**Learning options for families**

We believe that students enjoy a rich experience when they learn together. For parents who are looking for an alternative to in-person learning this fall, Prairie Spirit offers a number of options for families to consider. Please go to: [welcome.spiritsd.ca](http://welcome.spiritsd.ca) for an overview of the options available for students this fall.

We are looking forward to a new school year with a continued strong focus on student learning in Prairie Spirit schools. We want to ensure a smooth transition for everyone at the start of this new year. We are committed to providing regular updates to parents. Thank you for your patience and support.

Sincerely,



Darryl Bazylak  
Director of Education