



NWT Education Bulletin: Back to School

August 2020

In response to the continually evolving situation of COVID-19, the upcoming 2020-2021 school year for students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (JK-12) will include new and enhanced measures to protect the health and safety of educational staff, students and their families in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

All 49 schools in the NWT have put in place additional plans and processes to meet the requirements set out in the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer's (OCPHO) [Emerging Wisely](#) plan and [Backgrounder on Reopening Schools](#). Schools have built flexibility into their reopening plans to be able to shift learning approaches for students between in-person, blended and distance learning, depending on the COVID-19 situation.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment's (ECE) [Reopening Schools Safely Plan](#), released on July 4, 2020, outlined the general measures students and their caregivers can expect to see during the upcoming JK-12 school year. These measures focus on helping students and school staff maintain a safe physical distance, and apply good hygiene and healthy respiratory practices, while continuing to learn and benefit from the school environment.

The following bulletin provides further information on the 2020-2021 school year, including:

- Learning, assessment, and reporting for JK-12 students
- Wellness supports for students and families
- New, territory-wide screening and isolation procedures to protect the health and safety of students, staff and communities
- School response protocols during a potential COVID-19 outbreak

ECE continues to work closely with education bodies and the NWT Teachers' Association (NWTTA) on the safe reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year.

Reopening Schools

Supporting Learning and Emerging Wisely

- Containment Phase**
In-person learning suspended and all students distance learning
- Phase One**
Distance or blended learning for majority of students
In-person learning prioritized for youngest students (JK-6) and Grade 12 students
Focus on school access for vulnerable students (e.g. those at-risk or with complex needs)
- Phase Two**
Full time, in-person learning as much as possible
Classroom 'bubbles' for JK-Grade 6
Physical distancing for Grades 7-12
Flexible learning approaches for all students as needed
- Phase Three**
Continued focus on in-person learning with physical distancing
More indoor group activities allowed with physical distancing (e.g. choir or band classes)
- Phase Four**
School returns to normal, with classroom based learning as usual

Government of Northwest Territories

Returning to school

Schools are reopening this fall and all JK-12 students are expected to attend and participate in the educational programming offered. The majority of JK-12 students will be able to attend full-time for in-class instruction, while some may be asked to do a blend of in-person and at-home learning throughout the school year.

Students who are well are expected to be in attendance at school. Students who cannot safely attend school for health reasons (refer to Student Support and Wellness section below) or temporary self-isolation needs will be supported to learn from home through remote learning. Parents of healthy students who decide to keep their children at home will need to take on the responsibilities of home schooling as per the Home Schooling Regulations (refer to 'Home schooling' section below).

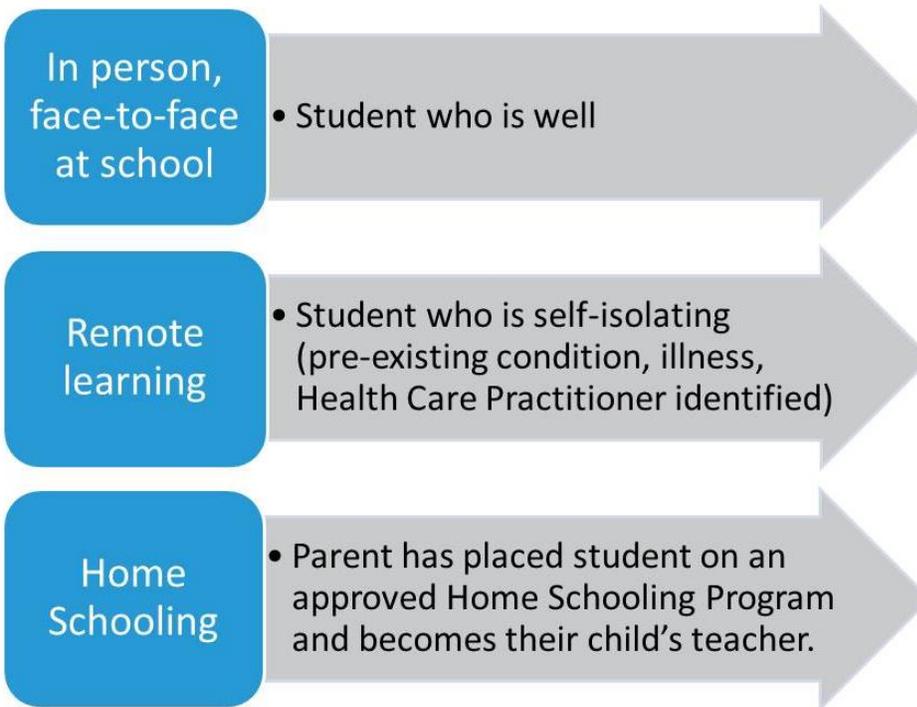
Although teachers and school staff will be doing everything they can to ensure school continues to be a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, it is likely going to look and feel different for



everyone. We also recognize that there may be challenges for both students and staff in returning to school after a lengthy break from in-person, classroom-based learning. There will be a focus on prioritizing student mental health and wellness throughout this transition back to school.

While we cannot control or predict the realities of the pandemic, ECE is committed to ensuring that learning continues for all NWT students, regardless of the circumstances. Please refer to your student's school reopening plan for more information on what education will look like at your school and in your community.

Which education program access type is for my child(ren)?



Learning in 2020-2021

ECE, in partnership with all NWT education bodies, is offering learning opportunities that meet the demands of NWT curricula during this challenging time. Recognizing that students will have had varying opportunities for learning while at home, teachers will be maximizing opportunities for students to catch up on key concepts throughout the school year. Teachers will communicate regularly with students and their parents or guardians about learning expectations and progress so that they are prepared to take a more active role in facilitating their child(ren)'s education, should circumstances change regarding the COVID-19 situation in the NWT.



Grading and report cards

Student assessment, evaluation and reporting processes will return to pre-COVID-19 conditions. This means that every JK-12 NWT student will receive grades and report cards in the 2020-2021 school year according to existing school policies and scheduled dates. Teachers will be responsible for assessing a student's progress to-date, assigning grades or levels as appropriate, and providing meaningful feedback to students, parents and guardians.

High school courses (Grades 10-12)

High school programming (Grades 10-12) and graduation requirements will mostly return to normal. This means the temporary high school course completion processes established during school pandemic closures are no longer current or available. If there are special circumstances (including blended learning), needs or situations where special accommodations should be considered, this can be explored with the student's teacher and principal.

AATs and Diploma Exams

Both the Alberta Achievement Tests (AATs) for Grades 6 and 9 and Grade 12 course Diploma Exams are programs developed and administered by Alberta Education. If Alberta decides to hold AATs or Diploma Examinations, the NWT will evaluate our position to offer them to NWT students closer to their scheduled writing time. Teachers should continue to prepare their students to write these assessments.

Students aged 19 and over

As per the recommendations of the OCPHO, students who turn 19 after December 31, 2020 will be allowed to attend school in person for the duration of the school year. Students who turn 19 on or before December 31, 2020 will need to stop attending school in person prior to their nineteenth birthday. It is recommended that students who turn 19 on or before December 31, 2020 begin distance learning at the start of the school year so they will not have to be asked to leave mid-year.

School staff will make every effort to work with their Grade 10, 11 and 12 students to complete their core subject courses, providing a final mark and awarding credits.

Northern Distance Learning

Northern Distance Learning (NDL) is expected to continue as usual with students attending in their NDL classrooms for live classes hosted from Inuvik with the usual support of In-class Support Persons (ISPs).

There may be an opportunity for students to take additional courses through NDL. The program offers a range of academic or "-1" courses in the following communities: Inuvik, Fort Resolution, Fort Liard, Fort McPherson, Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, Fort Good Hope, Ulukhaktok, Behchokò, Délı̄nę, Tulita, Fort Simpson, Fort Providence, Łutselk'e, Paulatuk and Whatì. For more information, consult our [fact sheet](#) or contact the school principal.



Learning on the land

Finding creative ways to provide quality education, where we can be physically distant, is more crucial than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. While schools are always encouraged to provide land-based and hands-on learning for NWT students, there are now even more benefits to using these approaches.

Land-based learning opportunities, which also include the school playground area, can provide alternative possibilities for expanding a classroom environment. Students may have the opportunity to experience new cultural activities, participate in independent learning projects, or expand their learning through play.

Home schooling

Parents or guardians in the NWT have the right to home school their children. Parents or guardians who are interested in registering their children for home schooling must formally meet with the school and submit a learning plan for each child at the time of registration. Once the learning plan is approved and the children are enrolled, the parent or guardian then takes on the responsibility for teaching their children. For clarity, once a learning plan is approved, it is expected that the program be carried to completion over the course of the semester or school year as applicable. Home schooling parents will not have access to a teacher at the school to provide support.

Contact your local [education body](#) for specific information about its home schooling process and how to register. Parents or guardians may be entitled to reimbursement for eligible expenses in accordance with the education body policy in their region.

Students who are unable to safely attend school for health reasons will be supported to learn from home and would not be considered 'home schooled' under the Home Schooling Regulations.

Student support and wellness

Students with underlying health conditions

There may be students who are unable to safely attend school for health reasons. These students will be supported to learn from home through remote learning. Each special circumstance should be evaluated by a health care practitioner, on a case-by-case basis, to determine whether it is safe to attend school.

If parents or guardians have concerns they should:

- Consult their child's health care practitioner to determine whether it is medically safe for their child to return to school.
- Contact your child's school to discuss available options and support, if it is not safe to return to school.



Counselling Services

Many students may be experiencing anxiety about returning to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents and guardians can support their child(ren)'s mental health by taking time to listen to and validate their concerns and feelings, and by having conversations around how they feel, especially about changes caused by the pandemic, such as limits on how they can interact with friends and participate in some activities, like sports, music, traditions or special events.

Mental wellness counselling services will continue to be available to students either in-person or through virtual care technology and telephone services. All students will be eligible to access counselling services, regardless of whether or not they were already receiving counselling. Virtual workshops and resources for education staff will be available and information about contacts for counselling support has been shared with the schools. In addition, mental wellness supports are available for education staff through Starling Minds and Lifespeak.

Starling Minds is a digital Cognitive Behavioural Therapy platform that is available to all education staff. It provides comprehensive mental health support to increase mental fitness, develop a return to health program and prevent and reduce stressors. Staff can contact the NWTTA for more information and for their account logins.

Lifespeak is a digital total wellbeing platform that is available to all GNWT employees and their families. It provides confidential access to expert information and videos on a wide range of topics. GNWT staff can get more information from the Covid-19 section of the My HR website.

Healthy food programming

Education Bodies receive funding to provide healthy food to students at school, such as breakfast, snacks, lunch and care-packages. Each school will be providing information to students and families regarding what programs will be offered and how to access them.

Assistive technology

Assistive technologies reduce or remove barriers to learning, such as voice recognition technologies, screen readers, iPad apps, support software, grips, and so on. Needed assistive technologies are documented in Student Support Plans (SSPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). All students will have access to their assistive technologies whether they are learning at school or through remote learning.



Safety Procedures

With students returning to school this fall, all NWT schools have plans in place to effectively meet the recommendations of the OCPHO to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 and keep students, staff and communities safe.

All parents and guardians have a role to play in supporting their school plans by:

1. Using the Student Screening Tool for COVID-19 symptoms **every morning** with every child in your care;
2. Keeping child(ren) **home** if they are showing one major or two minor COVID-19 symptoms, if they have been outside of the territory or in contact with someone who is ill or has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19;
3. Modelling safe physical distancing and handwashing;
4. Picking students up from school as soon as you are notified.

Families and caregivers can call 8-1-1 or their local health centre with questions about COVID-19.

Daily screening process for students

STUDENT SCREENING	First Layer: Parent/Guardian	Second Layer: School	Third Layer: Student
<p>Safety is a shared responsibility.</p> <p>By having layers of screening,</p>	Complete the <i>Student Screening Tool</i> at home BEFORE the child leaves for school.	As part of morning and afternoon routines, education staff will screen the classroom of students using the <i>Student Screening Tool</i> .	Students will be taught how to self-screen and let their teachers know when they start to feel unwell.
	If a child shows one major symptom or two minor symptoms, parents keep that	If a student shows one major symptom or two minor symptoms, the staff will follow isolation room protocols.	



<p>We can all help keep ourselves, others and our communities safe!</p>	<p>child at home. They CANNOT come to school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff will transport students to a safe isolation room in the school where students can lay down while waiting for their parents or guardians to pick them up. ● The person showing symptoms and the staff supervising the isolation space will be given surgical masks. ● The isolation room monitors will have been trained in the safety protocols for the isolation space.
	<p>INFORM the school using the regular absence reporting process.</p>	<p>The school will contact the parents or guardians to inform and ask them to pick up their child(ren) from school and call Public Health for a medical assessment.</p> <p>In cases where transport of a student is necessary staff will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Follow the emergency transportation protocol of the community in the case of urgent care. ● Follow directions of medical staff if transport is to a medical/health facility.
	<p>Call your HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONER for advice as to next steps.</p>	<p>Parents will follow the advice of their health care practitioner as to next steps.</p>

Daily screening process for school staff

School staff also play an important role in supporting school plans to keep everyone safe. All school staff **must** self-screen every day **before** entering the school. This screening process will help to prevent the possible spread of COVID-19.

Staff must:

1. Using the Staff Screening Tool for COVID-19 symptoms **every morning**;
2. Stay at **home** if they are showing one major or two minor COVID-19 symptoms, if they have been outside of the territory or in contact with someone who is ill or has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19;
3. Inform school administration of their absence using the regular process;
4. Contact their health care practitioner for advice as to next steps.

Staff can call 8-1-1 or their local health centre for help with any questions about COVID-19. Refer to this [fact sheet](#) for more information on self-monitoring.



For staff with pre-existing or underlying medical conditions or risk factors, refer to the NWT COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for JK-12 Schools, Appendix D.

Isolation process for students and staff

Each school's reopening plan includes a dedicated room where a student can safely isolate if they begin to show symptoms of COVID-19 while at school. The student will be accompanied by a staff member and will be kept safe during this time. The parents or guardians of a student with symptoms will be notified immediately of their child's status and asked to pick them up from school as soon as possible to take them for medical assessment.

If a staff member begins to show COVID-19 symptoms at school, they will notify school administration and follow the school safety plan.

Returning to school following self-isolation

The health care practitioner will let staff and students (and their parents or guardians) know when it is safe to return to school following a period of self-isolation or illness. The health care provider will also notify the school so that the school is aware that the student has been cleared to return to school.

Should a student or staff member return to school before they have been advised to do so, they will be sent home immediately.

School COVID-19 outbreak response protocol

The Chief Public Health Officer has the authority to close schools if this is necessary to ensure public health. Each school has an approved plan for how it will continue to provide learning opportunities for students in the event of a temporary school closure.

A school outbreak means that one case of COVID-19 has been acquired within the building, suggesting that transmission in the school is occurring. The Office of the Chief Public Health Officer determines and announces when a school outbreak is occurring and when it has ended. They will instruct the school on when to close and what to do if a school outbreak occurs. This may be different in each case, depending on the situation.

If a COVID-19 outbreak occurs in a community or school, the response will occur only for those schools impacted. This will not necessarily result in the closure of other schools in the region, or result in a system-wide closure of all schools in the NWT. This is to be avoided so as to minimize disruption of learning for students.

If there is a COVID-19 outbreak in a school, it will close temporarily to contain the spread and allow Public Health to carry out contact tracing and testing of individuals potentially exposed to the virus.



Schools are well-positioned to identify signs of a potential outbreak as they see students on a daily basis. Attendance is taken each day electronically in a common territorial system. In addition, contact is made from the school with parents and caregivers when a student is absent. Unusual absences may signal a potential case of COVID-19.

Schools will notify the community health centre or public health unit if higher levels of absenteeism than expected occur. Schools will also have an exit and entry log to track anyone who is coming into the building so that all potential contacts can be easily traced.

Notification letters will be sent home to advise parents and caregivers of a school outbreak. Public health will communicate with and determine when individuals impacted by a school outbreak may return to school.

Following an outbreak, the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, education authorities, school administration and NWT Health and Social Services Authorities will meet to review and evaluate, ensuring improvements are made in protocols, if necessary.

Further information

ECE will continue to ensure up-to-date information on JK-12 education is made available to students and parents or guardians.

Additional information specific to school schedules, procedures and other requirements will be provided by schools and education bodies.