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Dear Members,

We hope that this letter finds each of you healthy and safe and enjoying some down time during the summer months. While the warm weather was slow to come, we are heading into a heat wave as the days become shorter and Fall jumps into view. Keep cool!

As many of you are aware, the Ministry of Education recently announced a Stage 2 Restart Plan for the beginning of the 2020/21 school year. At this time all regular ten-month employees will be returning to school on September 8th and students will be returning on September 10th, 2020.

Specific information has been scarce of late, but our Local Union has been advised that school district safety plans and restart schedules must be in place by August 26th.

Our Unit Chairs and President will be meeting with each of the districts over the next few weeks to discuss the plans and we will share whatever information we receive through email, prior to the start date. Once plans and schedules have been put in place, you should be hearing from your administrator or site supervisor.

It is our understanding that employees will be given orientation time to familiarize with the site-specific plan:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/covid-19-return-to-school>

During the July 29th announcement, Minister Fleming and Dr. Henry advised that \$46.5 million dollars would be divided up between school districts for increased cleaning, staffing and enhanced health measures. For more information regarding the restart plan please click on the link:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-education-restart-plan.pdf>

Stage 2 Safety Plans

Stage 2 safety plans are being drafted in consultation with our Unit Chairs, President and National Representative. Once completed, the plans are required to be shared with employees, parents and students. This will be posted on site (OH&S bulletin board) and on the school district website. Your Unit Chair will send notification through email specifically for your District once your school district's plan is complete. For information on safety plans, please click on this link:

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/covid-19-returning-safe-operation/education>

Your Local Executive shares your concerns regarding the government's current plan and our school districts implementation of said plans. We are working closely with our National Reps and other regional and provincial Locals to help develop some strategies that will keep our members safe, that follow best practices, that adhere to our Collective Agreements and that secure our wages and benefits.

K12 JOINT STEERING COMMITTEE - CUPE BC

CUPE BC currently has four members sitting on the Joint Provincial Steering Committee which include President Paul Faoro, Staff reps Tracey Mathieson and Tina Meadows and the President of the K-12 President Council Warren Williams. They have been meeting regularly with the BCTF, Provincial PAC, Principal and Vice Principal Association and Trustee groups on the joint committee.

The latest interview with President Paul Faoro on the Mike Smith show (transcript for reference) as well as Warren Williams letter to members on July 30th can be found by clicking the following links:

<https://omny.fm/shows/mike-smyth/cases-are-going-up-will-the-back-to-school-plan-ch?fbclid=IwAR31gZQ6sLMC-u93gqefmfN8O5dUQxnhaPBmVY57eOOUhmfPezG6XnNyDs>

https://bcschools.cupe.ca/files/2020/08/Faoro-transcript_.pdf

https://bcschools.cupe.ca/files/2020/07/Important_Information_on_K-12_Restart_2020_07_30.pdf

Duty to Accommodate

The following links will provide you with some legal information regarding accommodations. If you require a medical/family status accommodation, we recommend that you read these links and contact one of your Unit Shop Stewards or Unit Chair (listed below) for assistance, prior to contacting your HR District Employer.

You may be required to submit medical documentation to substantiate your request. When speaking with your doctor, please provide a detailed description of your workplace duties and any other pertinent information in order to determine what level of accommodation you need (**limitations, restrictions and prognosis only**). At this point, all three districts have stated that there will be no working-from-home positions, however, this could change should the government switch back to stage 3 of the restart framework. See:

<https://bcschools.cupe.ca/>

<https://cupe.ca/what-duty-accommodate-0>

Unit Contact Lists from our Local 523 website

<https://523.cupe.ca/>

Unit 53

<https://523.cupe.ca/files/2020/03/Unit53-Contacts-2020.pdf>

Unit 67

<https://523.cupe.ca/files/2020/04/Unit67-Contacts-2020.pdf>

Unit 83

<https://523.cupe.ca/files/2020/02/Unit83-Contacts-2020.pdf>

Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC)

Every school site/building in BC that has twenty or more employees is required to have a JOHSC Committee. In most of our sites, this is made up of a CUPE member, a member from the teacher's union and one Vice Principal or Principal of the school.

This committee is usually formed within the first two months of school and requires the committee members to have yearly training provided by the employer. We believe that it is crucial to get these committees up and running as soon as possible. In addition, both School District 53 and 83 have a District Committee which includes two elected CUPE members.

If you are planning on being the JOHSC rep at your site this year, it is important that you connect with your Unit's Local 523 OH&S rep. Their contact information can be found accessing the local links above - under Committees. Please email them with your personal contact email and they will help guide you through this process.

As a site JOHSC rep, you will be paid by the employer to attend one meeting a month and work with your committee to:

- Identify hazards in the workplace
- Make recommendations to the employer
- Inspect the site twice a year
- Provide support for your coworkers on OH&S concerns.

Now more than ever, it is important for our Local Units to have regular contact with each site committee member and the Local Committee is working on developing additional tools and training to help support site committees. Below are some helpful links:

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/create-manage/joint-health-safety-committees>

<https://cupe.ca/health-and-safety-practices-while-working-during-pandemic-all-sectors>

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Ministry of Education has provided each district with funding to purchase PPE for the safety of employees and students. At this time, wearing of masks is voluntary. It is the Union's position that wearing masks and any/all other PPE is recommended, if possible. Your Unit Chair will provide information regarding the roll out of PPE in your Unit once that information is finalized:

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/posters/help-prevent-spread-covid-19-how-to-use-mask?lang=en>

Right to Refuse Unsafe Work

If you feel you have been placed in an unsafe working environment, each of you has an individual right to refuse unsafe work. The local has shared the steps for reporting unsafe work in previous emails but you can find more information using the following link:

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/create-manage/rights-responsibilities/refusing-unsafe-work>

Extended Medical Benefits – Public Employee Benefit Trust (PEBT)

As of July 2020, for those units on the Provincial Extended Health Plan, some of the benefit provisions have been increased. Please refer to the following website for your district's plan:

Unit 67 and Unit 83

<https://www.pebtbenefits.ca/ms/en/default.asp>

Government Official Contact information

We encourage all of you to continue to raise any concerns you may have regarding the current return to in-class sessions with your local and government officials. See links below for MLA info:

- MLA Linda Larson Boundary Similkameen
<https://www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members/41st-Parliament/Larson-Linda>
- MLA Dan Ashton – Penticton
<https://www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members/41st-Parliament/Ashton-Dan>
- MLA Greg Kylo – Shuswap
<https://www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members/41st-Parliament/Kylo-Greg>
- Rob Fleming – Minister of Education
Email – educ.minister@gov.bc.ca
- Dr Bonnie Henry
Email bonnie.henry@gov.bc.ca

As an Executive, we have been putting in a lot of volunteer hours this summer to support our members through these uncertain times. I have heard from our Unit Chairs, Stewards and various Committee Reps, relaying the fears and challenges our casual and regular members have been facing over the last 6 months. It has not been easy time and COVID has taught us a lot about ourselves and our communities.

While there have been some unsettling events, for the most part, our province has come together to flatten the curve and at the same time, we continue to look out for each other in loving and supportive ways. The coming weeks will be crucial in determining the next steps and may result in further changes and it is important that you stay in regular communication with your Unit Chairs and Stewards.

Over the next few weeks, please continue to check your personal email for specific information regarding your Unit and do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or need assistance. We hope all of you will get to relax and spend time with close family and friends before the start of the school year.

As support staff, we are the foundation of every school and this year (whatever it ends up looking like) will be unprecedented and will require a great deal of energy and flexibility from all of us. Anxiety may very high right now but our Local members (1,100 strong) will continue to guide and support our students and each other over the next school year. We have shown ourselves to be resilient and we will get through this difficult time.

On behalf of the Executive we want to thank everyone for all of your hard work and dedication to our communities.

Take care and stay safe.

Tammie Koroluk

President of Local 523

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