

# *Welcome to the 2021-2022 school year!*

## **BRSD Back-to-School Plan (Fall 2021)**

Released August 24, 2021;  
Updated September 24, 2021; updated October 25, 2021;  
Updated January 11, 2022



*This plan was prepared based on information that was current to August 24, 2021 and updated most recently based on information that was current on January 11, 2022...*

*We acknowledge that, as circumstances in Alberta change, our plan will continue to change as well.*

## A message from the Superintendent:

Hello everyone!

After the long, strange year that was 2020-2021, we have all been looking forward to returning to a more 'normal' school environment for the 2021-2022 year.

Here in Battle River School Division, our top priority is to ensure that school is a safe and healthy environment in which students feel comfortable to learn and staff feel comfortable to work. The school division feels strongly about balancing restrictions and opportunities, in order to maintain environments that are safe, but also create environments that are conducive to both positive learning and positive wellbeing. It's been a challenging time for both students and staff. We want to do everything we can to support them.

With that in mind, the school division will be restoring many activities and opportunities, while also doing our best to maintain a safe environment.

On the coming pages, we will share more information about what will be coming back, along with the strategies we will be using to make those activities possible.

If you have specific questions about how to meet the needs of a specific student, please contact the Principal of your child's school directly.

If you have other questions that haven't been answered here, please be in touch with us! We'll do our best to provide answers. Direct your questions to Diane Hutchinson, Director of Communications, [dhutchinson@brsd.ab.ca](mailto:dhutchinson@brsd.ab.ca)

We know that, especially right now, things can change quickly. Battle River School Division has pledged to review its practices regularly in the coming months and make changes as required.

Please watch the [BRSD School Re-Entry \(Fall 2021\)](#) section of our website for ongoing updates.

*Rita Marler*  
*Superintendent of Schools*

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## Wellness

The last 20 months have been an incredibly challenging time for all of us. Disruption and uncertainty have led to an increase in stress levels and anxiety for students, families, staff and communities.

Battle River School Division has a dedicated Wellness Support Team whose work is designed to support students, families and staff in staying well.

**The BRSD Wellness Support Team** includes, but is not limited to:

- BRSD Family School Liaison team.
- BRSD Mental Health Capacity Building team.

We want school to be a place where everyone belongs. It is the goal of the BRSD Wellness Support Team to help all students and staff feel safe, calm and connected at school.

Every school will have ongoing access to a member of the BRSD Wellness Support Team. In collaboration with school administrators, the Wellness Support Team will assess what supports are required at each school. This will guide the services provided for students and also for staff.

If a student under the age of 14 is requiring on-going support, caregivers will be contacted by the FSLW team. Parents and caregivers can also reach out to the Wellness Support Team for referrals to 1:1 in-school mental health support or access to community agencies.

Watch for activities and events designed to support student wellbeing and belonging throughout the year.

## *Many activities are coming back*

We know that students and staff have been missing many of the activities and opportunities that were cancelled last year. In order to help enhance student wellness, here is what will be coming back:

- Extra-curricular sports teams (with some limitations)
- Performance opportunities including Band / Music and Drama
- Field trips
- Breakfast and Hot lunch programs, including with parent volunteers
- Microwaves
- Guest speakers
- The opportunity to sit with other students in common areas or gather with friends at recess
- Assemblies and ceremonies (with some limitations)

## *Strategies that will make activities possible*

We are aware that bringing back all of these activities comes with risks. In order to help mitigate the risks, we are implementing the following strategies on a division-wide basis:

- 1. making masks mandatory for all riders on school buses, and for all staff, as well as all students in Grade 4 to 12 while in school hallways / common areas and when in close contact. This was directed by AHS on September 15.**
- 2. cohorting of students in Kindergarten to Grade 6. This was directed by AHS on September 15.**
- 3. asking students / families and staff to do daily self-assessments of their health, and STAY HOME if they are not well.**
- 4. offering hand sanitizer and conducting daily cleaning.**
- 5. participating in the vaccine program AHS is planning for schools (for students who have parental permission to be vaccinated).**
- 6. implementing a temporary COVID-19 Hazard Control process through a “proof of negative test or vaccination” program for all school staff and visitors to school buildings, including parents, volunteers, coaches, contractors, user groups and more. This was developed based on the recommendation of Alberta Education and Alberta Health. It will begin October 29.**

More details about each of these strategies is included in the following pages. Individual schools may also retain some of the practices that were put in place last year, if those practices have proven to enhance the school environment. This might mean students continue to enter through different doors; that lunch or recess times are staggered; or include other strategies that were found to be beneficial.

## **Masks are mandatory for all riders on buses, as well as for all staff and students in Grades 4 to 12 while in hallways and common areas**

On September 15, the Alberta Government and Alberta Health Services directed that, in addition to masking being mandatory for all riders on public transportation (which includes school buses) the mask mandate was now mandatory for all school staff, as well as students from Grade 4 to Grade 12, at the following times:

- While moving through the school hallways.
- If in close contact with other students or staff (sitting together without any distance between chairs or in a small, closed office, etc).
- While gathered in commons areas or other places such as assemblies, with groups of students. Students seated around tables at lunch time should wear masks except while eating.

When students and staff are in their classrooms and settled in their seats, masks can be removed.

In early January, 2022, Alberta Education and Alberta Health announced that cloth masks were no longer considered adequate to protect against the most recent COVID-19 variant. Alberta Education committed to supplying medical-grade masks to all students and staff of Alberta schools. The first shipment of these masks, along with rapid test kits, were scheduled for delivery to schools during the week of January 10.

Alberta Health also recommended that students of all ages wear masks while at school. While K to 3 students are welcome to wear masks, BRSD will not be requiring this.

Masks will not be required outdoors or when participating in physical and performance activities, but should be worn when seated on the bench. Students and staff are always welcome to leave their masks on at all times if they choose to do so.

Mask exemptions can be made for students who have a current doctor's note.

### **Elementary Students (Kindergarten to Grade 6) will remain in cohorts.**

On September 15 the Alberta Government and Alberta Health mandated that all Kindergarten to Grade 6 students would remain in cohorts – small groups of students that separate themselves from others. The intent of cohorting is to mitigate the risk of exposure for younger students. This also makes it possible for Kindergarten to Grade 3 students to not wear masks within the school.



made by the Board of Trustees. They have committed to reviewing the procedure regularly and making changes as the situation in Alberta changes.

The intention of this temporary procedure is to ensure that our schools do everything they can to ensure the health and wellbeing of students. The school division hopes to make it possible for schools to stay in session and for students to continue to safely participate in the school-based activities and events that help students stay physically and mentally healthy.

For the short term, the procedure provides all school division staff, parents, visitors, coaches, user groups, etc three choices related to being at school, on school buses or in BRSD buildings. They are:

- Provide proof of vaccination and be welcomed to work, volunteer or attend events.
- Provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test, obtained within the last 72 hours and be welcomed to work, volunteer or attend events. This may be a pharmacy test or, in the case of employees, a self-administered rapid tests began to be accepted,
- Choose not to provide any proof. In the case of staff, this would mean choosing to take an unpaid leave of absence. In the case of parents, volunteers, coaches or others, this would mean choosing to not enter a BRSD school or worksite until the temporary procedure is lifted.

A copy of the full Administrative Procedure is available at this link: <https://www.brsd.ab.ca/download/369275>

## What to expect at school

Students and parents are wondering what a school day might look like in the fall of 2021.

### *Before Leaving Home Each Morning*

All students and staff must complete the [Daily Self-Assessment](#) (pages 3 and 4 apply to students, page 1 and 2 applies to adults).

Families are **not** required to submit the form to the school each day. Students who have any symptoms noted on the questionnaire must stay home.

### *On the Bus*

All riders are required to wear a mask on the school bus.

### *Arriving at School*

Adults bringing students to school / picking them up are to stay in their vehicle or outside the school.

**Hand sanitizer** will continue to be available for student and staff use.

**Lockers** are available for student use.

### **Breakfast Programs**

Students will be able to access breakfast at school. Volunteers will be able to support these programs, as long as they have proof of negative test result or vaccination, are well, wear masks and use appropriate hand washing / sanitizing practices. Food should either be individually wrapped or be distributed directly to individual students and not set out 'buffet-style'.

### ***Lunch***

Microwaves and vending machines will be available to students. Volunteers are able to assist with hot lunch programs, as long as they provide proof of negative test result or vaccination, are well, wearing masks and use appropriate hand washing / sanitizing practices.

### ***Food in Schools***

Potluck events are not yet permitted. Barbecues, food trucks or special lunch days (e.g. hot dog day) can take place, as long as proper food handling procedures are followed and those working with the food at school provide proof of negative test result or vaccination, are well, wearing masks and washing / sanitizing appropriately. Food should be distributed directly to individual students as much as possible and not set out 'buffet-style'.

### ***Hallways and Common Areas***

All students and staff from Grades 4 to 12 will wear masks while moving through the hallways and common areas at schools or offices. Students in younger grades are welcome to wear masks, but it is not required.

### ***Water Bottle Filling Stations***

Water bottle filling stations have been installed at every school. Every student should bring a clearly labelled water bottle to school for their personal use.

### ***Recess***

Individual schools may choose to stagger recess times for different grades or groups of students. Once outside, masks will not be required. Elementary students must remain in their cohorts.

### ***School Council Meetings***

In-person School Council meetings may go ahead in school buildings, outside of school hours, with all participants who are attending in person asked to provide proof of negative test result or vaccination. If a School Council wishes to meet virtually rather than in person, this will be supported.

### ***Volunteers and Visitors***

Volunteers for specific purposes, such as breakfast and lunch programs, as well as in specific classrooms or field trips, will be allowed in Division schools by appointment or advance arrangement, if they provide proof of negative test result or vaccination, are well and wear a mask. Parents are welcome to make an appointment to visit with their child's teacher or the school leadership. All parents entering the school must provide proof of negative test result or vaccination, be well and wear a mask.

It should be noted that, if a parent needs to "pop in" to the school entrance way in order to drop off a forgotten lunch or see their own child briefly for any reason, a mask must be worn but proof of negative test or vaccination is not required. In addition, in the event a child becomes ill or injured, the school will always ensure the child gets safely into the care of their parent.

### ***Assemblies, Grads and Other Ceremonies***

In-school gatherings that bring multiple cohorts of junior or senior high students together are permitted as long as all participants are wearing masks. Elementary students should not be attending assemblies, as they are staying in cohorts.

Parents will be welcome to attend events outside of school hours, if their child is participating in the event. This includes such things as games, performances or awards nights. All parents are asked to provide proof of negative test result or vaccination, wear masks and ensure they are well. Other spectators / attendees will not be permitted. Further limitations on spectators and visitors could be put in place at a school temporarily, depending on AHS regulations and circumstances. Many schools are also offering livestream options, so people can view games or performances without entering a school.

Guidelines for graduation ceremonies in the Spring / Fall of 2022 will be determined at a later time.

### ***Field Trips***

Field trips can take place although, effective January of 2022, they are not recommended by Alberta Health Services... All students, staff and accompanying volunteers must wear masks on the school bus and follow any COVID protocols that are in place at the field trip location.

### ***Extracurricular Activities (including athletics and music)***

Schools will return to extra-curricular activities, such as athletics, music and drama productions. Community coaches may enter school buildings to coach extracurricular sports, outside of school hours, after they have received Agent of the Board status. Coaches must provide proof of negative test result or vaccination, wear masks and only enter the building if they are well. Parents of participants will be welcome to attend games or performances outside of school hours. Larger groups of spectators are not yet permitted and additional restrictions could be put in place at a school depending on current AHS restrictions or circumstances.

### ***Community Use of Schools***

Community groups will be able to resume use of school facilities, such as gyms, outside of school hours. User group members must have proof of negative test result or vaccination. Please contact your school to make arrangements.

### ***School Photos***

School photo sessions can be scheduled.

### ***What to expect if there is a COVID case at a school***

Effective January of 2022, Alberta Health Services discontinued its contact notification process for Alberta Schools. At the same time, access to AHS COVID tests became restricted to only those who live or work in high-risk settings such as care centres or hospitals. Other Albertans were asked to rely on rapid tests results or simply stay home if they became symptomatic, without accessing a COVID test. As a result of these changes, BRSD schools became unable to provide accurate updates to families, so this practice was suspended.

In the event a grade or class reaches a point where student or staff absences, and other factors, make it impossible to continue to operate, a class or grade could be switched to remote learning for 10 days, at the discretion of the school division leadership. If an entire school needs to switch to remote learning permission must be obtained from Alberta Education.

### *BRSD's practice for ventilation and cleaning of school buildings has changed during COVID*

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, many people have questions about the processes for ventilation and air exchange at schools. Here's what we've been doing in Battle River:

- ***Extending the run times of ventilation systems***, to allow a 'building flush' both before and after students and staff are in the buildings. That extra run time is now two full hours both before and after occupancy.
- ***Setting our ventilation systems for maximum fresh air intake***. The 'maximum' varies, depending on outside air conditions – when it's very cold outside there is a freezing risk so the maximum intake is higher at some times than others.
- ***Installing the most efficient and high quality filters possible***. We have upgraded the filters that we use in our ventilation systems and continue to evaluate if further upgrades can be made.
- ***Scheduling more frequent filter changes***. BRSD has doubled the frequency of filter changes since the start of the pandemic. If a school experiences an outbreak or high case count, an additional filter change is done.

People also ask how we ensure our schools are clean. We have always ensured BRSD schools are thoroughly cleaned on a daily basis but since the start of the pandemic:

- ***The type of cleaning materials has been modified***, to include disinfecting agents, as well as cleaning agents.
- ***Supplies are available*** throughout school sites, if staff or students wish to provide additional wipe-downs of specific items during the day.
- In the event a school has an outbreak or high case numbers, an ***additional deep cleaning*** is done.

## Learning

An area of emphasis for all grade levels will be ensuring the continuation of strong literacy and numeracy development. We appreciate the support of Alberta Education in providing additional funding for this focus.

Most high schools are returning to a full semester system. However, specific schools will have some courses available on a quarterly basis.

Families who are seeking flexible learning options are encouraged to work with the Battle River Alternative Centre for Education (BRACE) to learn more about

- *Online Learning*, in which students learn from home, guided by a certified BRSD teacher. Online learning can be accessed by students throughout BRSD and can be used as a primary means of learning or to access courses in addition to those being taken at school.
- *Home Education*, in which parents lead the learning, with support from BRSD

## Reporting

Teachers will assess students throughout the school year. Student progress will be reported to parents at these key times during the year:

### 2021-22 Dates for Quarters, Semesters and Reporting

November 10th end of 1st Quarter

November 19th report card go home

- Full report cards for all, except Kindergarten

January 28 end of 2nd Quarter & end of first semester

Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> Full reports for students in semesters/and quarters

- No report cards for K to 6

April 12 end of 3rd Quarter

April 14 Report Cards go home K to 12

June 28 end of 4th Quarter and end of year

June 28 Full report home for all students

### Provincial Achievement Exams and Diploma Exams

Provincial Achievement Exams will be mandatory for students in Grade 6 and 9.

Diploma Exams will be mandatory for Grade 12.