

January 5, 2022

Dear parents, families and guardians,

Throughout the pandemic, our priority has always been to keep students and staff as safe as possible. We have a number of safety strategies that work together to help mitigate risk in our classrooms like promoting good hand hygiene, mandatory masks, enhanced cleaning practices and well-maintained ventilation systems.

Ventilation systems

While our current strategies have served us well throughout the pandemic, we continually look at emerging evidence and information available, as well as new COVID-19 variants like Omicron, so we can adjust and enhance our safety measures where possible.

Since the pandemic started, ventilation has been one of our priorities. All of our schools meet or exceed requirements outlined by the [American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Engineers \(ASHRAE\)](#).

In response to the pandemic, we have:

- increased the frequency of filter changes
- extended the operational times our systems run by two hours
- maximize fresh air intake
- increased inspections of the systems
- installed the highest quality filter as possible for each system

Enhancements

Updated recommendations from the Alberta chapters of ASHRAE has us looking at how we can further enhance our systems. Over the winter break, Edmonton Public Schools staff met with engineers and industry experts to understand what additional measures we can take. Further, over the winter break our professionals began visiting each of our 212 schools for a preliminary assessment of the work required to update our systems.

With 212 unique schools (in age and size), we won't have a one-size-fits all approach. Based on updated ASHRAE recommendations, we are looking at a number of options, which include:

- Adapt existing systems to fit MERV-13 filters
- In other cases, where installation of MERV-13 filters is not possible, we will be installing in-room air cleaners with either HEPA or MERV-13 filters

The Division has issued a Request for Proposals for vendors to provide additional ventilation units for our schools. These units will be carefully selected to meet the needs of our classrooms. We issued this request over the winter recess so we could expedite implementation of these units where needed.

Some school councils have indicated a desire to purchase HEPA filtration systems as an extra layer of protection for their child's school and other schools across the Division. This is not a regulated industry, so it will be important to follow specifications of the system as outlined by the Division. We will share more information with school councils soon.

Next steps

Our priority is to enhance our strategies to reduce the possibility of COVID-19 transmission in our schools. However, it will not eliminate the potential for transmission entirely. That's why there are a number of other safety measures in place to keep students and staff safe. More information will be provided to families about our next steps in this work soon.

More information to come tomorrow

Today, the province announced further information about a return to school next week. We will be providing more information to parents tomorrow.

Sincerely,



Darrel Robertson
Superintendent of Schools

