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September 4, 2020

Dear Prairie Spirit families:

I've noticed the Staples ad for back to school this year. It's very different from previous years – a mother pulling the plug on the pool water and smiling as the water drains and her children are left lounging on their floaties on the ground or a dad dancing down the school supply aisle at Staples while the sound system plays: "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year!"

This year, they have students talking about a new school and I feel like they borrowed Prairie Spirit's theme from the spring – *Learning is Everywhere!* The true beauty of getting to learn everywhere is that we get to do that together! We are excited that we get to go back to school.

It is indeed an unusual start to an unusual school year. There are different expectations and guidelines. Families are making difficult choices about what works best for them and school divisions are also making difficult decisions.

Level 2 – Saskatchewan Safe Schools Plan

At this time, each school division in Saskatchewan has made decisions regarding how their schools will open, in alignment with the [Saskatchewan Safe Schools Plan](#). School divisions do not make these decisions in isolation. We are not health experts, so we rely on the Ministry of Health and our Public Health Officers to direct us in these matters.

As a result of discussions with our health partners, it was decided that all Prairie Spirit schools would open this fall at Level 2 in the provincial plan. The decision to begin at Level 2 allows schools to start the school year from a position of safety and precaution, in the hope that we might be able to reduce our level as we assess.

We will be monitoring our situation for the first six weeks of the school year to determine whether we hold, lower or raise our level. Any decision to change our level will be made in consultation with the local Medical Health Officer and under the guidance of the Chief Medical Health Officer, the Ministry of Education and the Provincial Response Planning Team.

Level 2 – face masks in schools

At Level 2 in the Saskatchewan Safe Schools Plan, the Chief Medical Health Officer advises school divisions regarding the use of face masks by staff and students. A school division can legally require students to wear a mask as a matter of safety to other students and staff. This is a reasonable requirement as a result of COVID and is supported by Public Health and by the Ministry of Education.

In Prairie Spirit schools, we are following the Chief Medical Health Officer's guidance, which includes:

Pre-Kindergarten - Grade 3 students:

- **are required** to wear masks when riding the bus
- are encouraged to wear masks when physical distancing is not possible

Grade 4 - 12 students must wear a mask:

- when riding the bus
- when moving to and from classrooms
- in classrooms when appropriate physical distancing cannot be maintained
- when students are outside of their classroom cohort

All Prairie Spirit staff will wear a mask when physical distancing cannot be maintained.

STUDENTS AND MASKS in Prairie Spirit schools



Masks are required for students in Grades 4 to 12
Disposable masks will be available if a student forgets to bring their mask to school



Masks must be worn **whenever physical distancing is not possible**, including hallways, buses and some classrooms



Students are encouraged to bring their own non-medical, reusable cloth masks with 2 - 3 layers of fabric



Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 are encouraged to wear a mask

All Prairie Spirit staff members will be required to wear a mask when physical distancing is not possible.

PRAIRIE SPIRIT SCHOOL DIVISION

A student may qualify for a medical exemption from wearing a mask, but this would be for a medical reason and not because of personal preference. With a medical exemption from wearing a mask, a student will not be able to ride the bus, since physical distancing is not possible, unless previous arrangements for accommodation have been approved by the Division. In addition, accommodations will be needed at school to ensure the student is able to maintain a two-metre distance from all staff and students throughout the day. Please talk to your school's administration if you have questions about a medical exemption.

Prairie Spirit athletics

At this time, we are making plans for various aspects of our return to school for six weeks at a time. In order to give our schools a chance to reopen and focus on a safe start to the school year, Prairie Spirit has placed fall sports on hold until Friday, October 2. There will be no team formations, practices or games at this time.

Spirit eLearning

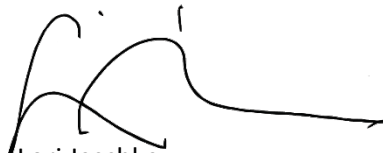
Prairie Spirit's online school for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students is now accepting [registrations](#). If you have questions about this option, please talk to your school administration.

Preparing your child for school

Our team of school counsellors has created a very supportive resource for parents as you prepare your child to return to school next week (see next page). I hope you will find these tips and ideas helpful and supportive as you talk to your child about what school will look like this year.

We are working hard to create a safe and smooth transition back to school and we will do that with care and creativity – together.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori Jeschke', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Lori Jeschke
Director of Education

Essentials

for a smooth *My Prairie Spirit* Classroom start



Build Connections:
Connection with others is key to mental wellness.

- Connect with your child's teacher. This will promote a closer teacher-student connection
- Practice COVID friendly greetings (hug yourself as the kids hug themselves, air hugs, air high fives, finger wiggles, dance etc.)
- Maintain attachment and a sense of belonging. When kids have deep roots at home, they do better when away from home
- Use warm eyes, warm voice, open body language

Know the Drill:
Routines provide security and help calm the brain. Knowledge is power.

- Go over your school's safety plan with your child to prepare them for the changed landscape they will encounter at school
- Practice, practice, practice: Many procedures will be new and it's harder to learn routines when our brains are stressed, so practice is essential
- Check for school communication regularly. School division practices will evolve as we go
- Remain open to changes

Expect Emotion:
Emotions need to flow for children to grow.

- Provide a safe space for kids to let their emotions out (scribbling, doodle books, drumming, rhythm games, dance, outdoor play, time to themselves)
- Check in with your child about how they're feeling: before school, after school. A wide range of emotions is likely to show up. When we give our feelings "space", they move on naturally
- Plan for meltdowns: Where can kids go to feel calmer? Who can you call for support when you need it?
- Encourage unstructured play. It is a great outlet for emotion
- Model confidence and calm if your child is worried, even if you're feeling worried too. Worry is natural

Read the Need:
What you see guides what you do.

- Consider what your child's actions may be telling you. Behaviour is communication (e.g., yelling at you may mean: "I'm worried and I don't like it")
- Children need to feel safe and connected before they can comply (read to your child, draw or colour, have fun and laugh together)
- Be aware that academics need to take a back seat until students are ready to learn. Kids are resilient and learning will happen

Take the Lead:
It's important that children see adults as being able to handle their world.

- Continue to give children the message (with words, tone of voice, and body language) that you can and will take care of them
- Say "yes" when you can
- Avoid power struggles (allow children to save face, have choices, and have time to comply)
- Empower your child. This increases a child's willingness to follow you and their capacity to handle what comes at them when away from you (give choices, opportunities for responsibility, chances to develop new skills)

Access Supports:
Two people can carry more emotion than one. Team is critically important!

- Connection and collaboration between home and school are more important than ever
- Consult with staff at your child's school (teachers, special ed. teachers, principals and vice-principals, counsellors, bus drivers) if you or your child have concerns, questions or things to celebrate
- Connect with those in your life you find helpful and who fill you up. Personal supports are critical in maintaining wellness

Kindness Matters:
When brains are stressed, it is easy to forget to be kind to ourselves and others.

- It sounds cliché, but being kind to yourself is important. Make time to do things that help you feel supported and strong
- Modelling kindness and caring for children will promote kindness and caring from them
- Challenging times can harden hearts but kindness helps to soften them
- Strive for understanding and patience. Mistakes and misunderstandings will occur for all of us

Learning is Everywhere:
Take time to understand where your students are at.

- Maturation and learning have happened during the shutdown. Share how you see your child with school staff
- Ongoing learning may look different than it has in the past
- Start where your child is at and build from there
- Your school expects variability in learning. People don't process information as well when they're stressed, so growth may be slower than normal



Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
Canada Suicide Prevention: 1-800-456-4566
Saskatoon Mobile Crisis: 1-306-933-6200
Prince Albert Mobile Crisis: 1-306-764-1011



Kids Help Phone: text CONNECT to 686868
Canada Suicide Prevention: text 45645
Youthspace: text 778-783-0177



Kids Help Phone: chat online at chat.kidshelpphone.ca