



VIA EMAIL

August 19, 2020

Hon. Scott Mow
Premier of Saskatchewan
Chair, Council of the Federation

RE: Safe Re-opening of Schools

Dear Premiers,

We would like to first commend your efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Canada. Your leadership and resolve have prevented Canada from facing similar outcomes as seen in other countries experiencing significant suffering due to the pandemic.

With the start of the school year approaching us, the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), the Canadian Association of Paediatric Nurses (CAPN), and the Community Health Nurses of Canada (CHNC) strongly recommend that your focus remain in fighting the pandemic. We urge extreme caution and strong protocols informed by public health advice to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to support physical distancing and other essential measures to prevent and detect transmission in schools.

Schools are critical to the well-being of our communities, providing supportive learning environments for children, employing teachers and other staff, and enabling parents, guardians, and caregivers to work¹. Safe re-opening of schools is noted by some public health experts to be an essential action to help mitigate the perpetuation of health and social disparities on some of our population's most vulnerable youth, including racialized and marginalized children, those living in poverty, and those exposed to home situations which may be unsafe. There are significant benefits to the re-opening of schools for all children this fall. However, the potential risks, if not appropriately addressed, could impact people not just within schools, but the greater society at large. A safe re-opening of schools is critical to the prevention of significant community transmission as emerging evidence suggests that COVID-19 can be efficiently transmitted by children of all ages². Failure to do so will impact the health of the population and could overwhelm the health-care system.

Across the country, parents and caregivers face difficult decisions for their children. Some are in positions of privilege and may have different alternatives to sending their children back to school if they find measures are not adequate. But many parents and children do not have these choices available to them, and their only option may be returning to school, even if measures are deemed to be inadequate. Efforts must be taken to prevent re-opening measures from disproportionately

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Preparing for a safe return to school*. 2020.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/prepare-safe-return.html>

² Government of Canada. *COVID-19 guidance for schools Kindergarten to Grade 12*. 2020.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/guidance-schools-childcare-programs.html>



affecting marginalized and vulnerable people and communities by perpetuating gaps in access to safe spaces and equal access to quality education.

We applaud the initiative from your governments in implementing health and safety protocols and mitigation strategies for re-opening schools from kindergarten to grade 12. We continue to see areas where adjustments can be made from a public health and nursing perspective to further ensure the safety and well-being of students, staff and our community at large.

We recommend that your governments pay special attention to the professional advice of nursing experts in your jurisdictions and take into consideration the importance of ensuring an appropriate level of supply of public health and school nurses in your re-opening plans.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and with schools re-opening, school nurses will play a critical role that bridges health-care and education, and ensures the safety of children and youth. Existing relationships between local public health nurses and schools can be leveraged to maximize the partnership between school boards and public health to effectively manage and respond to COVID-19 and its related impacts. Increasing public health nursing support in school communities is a critical step in the successful re-opening of schools during this time of uncertainty and instability.

We understand these are challenging times. If there is anything we can do to help your teams, you need only ask.

Sincerely,

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cc: Members of the Council of the Federation