

CIRCULAR

Date: October 27, 2020

To: Superintendents of School Divisions
Principals of Independent Schools
Manitoba School Boards Association
The Manitoba Teachers' Society
Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
Manitoba Association of School Business Officials
Manitoba Association of Parent Councils
Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools

Subject: Guidance for Schools to Accommodate Kindergarten to Grade 6 Students Who Are Children of Critical Services Workers during a Critical (Red) Pandemic Response System Level

Circular Number: COVID19: 2020-004 (Revised November 24, 2020)

Type: Policy Procedure For Information

Effective Date: Immediately

Background

The Manitoba Pandemic Response System at https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/restartmb/pandemic_response_system.pdf states that, during the Critical response level (Red), schools will be closed and remote learning will occur, with the exception of Kindergarten to Grade 6 students who are the children of essential workers. These students may still attend school.

Guidance

On August 19, 2020, the Pandemic Response System at https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/restartmb/pandemic_response_system.pdf was released. This system helps people understand the current level of risk and the public health guidance that must be followed. It is based on the following principles:

- A rising risk level should lead to stronger responses and restrictions.
- Responses for each risk level should be flexible and proportionate to the risks involved.
- Public health responses should be applied in a focused manner.
- Each risk level and response will continue to be guided by public health advice.
- Essential services will remain available during all risk and response levels.

In the event of a Critical (Red) response, additional public health measures will be required in schools and school divisions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. A critical response means extensive community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring and is not contained, there are widespread outbreaks and new clusters that cannot be controlled through testing and contact tracing, and the virus is being transmitted at levels that Public Health and the health system deem concerning or critical.

The Pandemic Response System states that in a Critical (Red) response, schools are closed to students, with the exception of Kindergarten to Grade 6 students who are children of critical services workers (CSWs) who cannot make alternative care arrangements. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to school divisions and schools to prepare to receive these children at a time when all students are required to move into teacher-led remote learning. Its intent is to ensure provincial consistency to the greatest extent possible, while accommodating local flexibility where needed.

This document does not provide answers for all individual situations. Schools and school divisions will need to consider how to best integrate this guidance within their local realities and specific situations.

A Critical (Red) response may see a range of scenarios and may require different periods of adjustment, planning, and time for children of CSWs to pivot back to school. It is unlikely that schools and school divisions will experience a Critical (Red) response similar to the spring of 2020, where all schools were closed across Manitoba at the same time for a period of months.

A Critical (Red) response may be broad or very localized to a school. For example:

- A broad Critical (Red) response may be initiated because of a community outbreak, where transmission is widespread in areas surrounding a school or school division, but where the outbreak can be safely managed within a school for children of CSWs by applying public health fundamentals and advice. In this case, because the high school students would all be learning remotely, high schools may be available for use by children of CSWs in order to accommodate increased physical distancing.
- A localized school response may see an outbreak within a school itself, requiring the entire school to transition to remote learning for at least two incubation periods (four weeks). This could mean that the school is not able to receive children of CSWs until self-isolation is complete, or that there is a lag time in receiving these students due to deep-cleaning requirements. It could also mean that accessing additional space in high schools may not be possible, as surrounding high schools may be operating normally.

In a Critical (RED) response, schools are also required to accommodate children over age 12 if their parent is a CSW who requires care and the child has a disability that precludes them from being able to stay at home independently. No medical note is required. Individualized education plans will be developed for students with special learning needs. Schools and school divisions may also use their discretion to accommodate high-risk students in a Critical (RED) response.

Public health recommendations for masks may be adjusted for this response level and should be monitored. Specific guidelines on current mask use in schools can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mask_guidance.pdf. Child care in schools will operate at reduced capacity and will be limited to children of CSWs, as outlined in the public health guidance for child care centres. Those who need child care should visit www.manitoba.ca/childcaresearch to locate facilities with current vacancies.

Consistent with guidelines for the limited use of school facilities that were in place in June 2020, this Critical (RED) response guidance allows multiple groups to operate in a school setting at the same time, provided these groups can be segregated to prevent contact with each other. The use of separate entrances/exits and staggered drop-off/pick-up schedules should be employed to minimize congestion and mixing of groups.

During a Critical (Red) response level, schools are not responsible for student transportation or supervision of students outside of regular school hours.

Recognizing that, in some rural, remote, and Northern communities, busing may be the only way to get children of CSWs to school, school divisions may use their discretion to provide bus transportation to children who do not have alternative means of transportation, provided two metres of distancing between passengers is maintained on the bus (please see the November 13 COVID-19 Bulletin #1 at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/bulletin1nov13.pdf).

If additional school staff need to be hired to provide supervision, schools, as defined in the *Public Schools Act*, are exempt from the *Community Child Care Standards Act*. This allows school divisions to hire additional supervisory school staff who do not have specific child care qualifications. All hired supervisory staff require completed child abuse registry and criminal record checks prior to working in a school setting.

As part of the planning process, schools and school divisions will need to consider the following questions:

- How many CSW families within the school/school division will need their child(ren) to attend school during a Critical (Red) response level? Schools/school divisions may want to use a survey to determine this.
- Are there opportunities to partner with existing child care providers to ensure care for Kindergarten to Grade 6 children of CSWs during, before, and after school hours?
- Have the protocols needed to ensure accordance with current health and safety guidelines, including a process to identify sites conducive to these requirements, been established? Current child care vacancies by facility can be tracked in the Manitoba Child Care Search at www.eswchildcare.ca/.
- Are there ways to maximize existing school space and ways to determine whether additional community space is required?
- When and how will learning opportunities be integrated into the scope of services, and who will provide that?

Directives from Manitoba Education and guidelines approved by public health officials will provide any additional guidance. Visit the Manitoba Education COVID-19 Education Plan at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html for up-to-date information.

Guiding Principles

The following principles will help schools and school divisions operationalize a Critical response. They are intended to guide process requirements, while maintaining flexibility to meet the unique local needs of communities.

- The safety and health of staff and students are central to process design, reflecting current public health recommendations.

- Processes will be dynamic and adaptable.
- Schools will strive for equity for all remote learners, whether they are receiving supports in school or at home.
- Sharing lessons learned and best practices is an effective way to help others and to build system-wide capacity.
- Regional decision making is important to respond to local needs.
- Manitoba Education is available to support school divisions, connect them with available resources, and to empower client-centred decision making.

Understanding Provincial- and Local-Level Decision-Making Responsibilities

Creating a process for schools and school divisions in a Critical response reflects a number of complexities. Below is a decision-making responsibility matrix. The “Issue” column identifies critical process elements. Each issue is paired with direction on who (either Manitoba Education or schools/school divisions) is responsible for decision making towards the direct resolution of that issue.

Issue	Decision-Making Responsibility	
	Manitoba Education	School/School Division
1. Creating the definition of a critical services worker (CSW)	X	
2. Applying the definition of a CSW to a local context (Schools/school divisions will need to prioritize the children of CSWs to meet local needs.)		X
3. Developing a standard form for CSW parents/guardians to complete	X	
4. Determining the number of students in each school who require supervision while their parents are performing critical services work. If there is another caregiver in the home, or on days that critical service workers are not at work, then the students should participate in remote learning from home. This is in keeping with the primary intent of providing supervision while parents and caregivers perform critical services.		X
5. Determining each school’s capacity, as staff and students will need to maintain two metres of physical distancing		X
6. Requiring Kindergarten to Grade 12 education providers (all teachers, administrators, and support staff) to report to their school, unless otherwise instructed by their school division or Public Health		X
7. Outlining the nature of the time students spend in school during a Critical (Red) response	X	X
8. Determining whether existing regulations/policies/legislation support this approach	X	
9. Determining how to use school space within a division		X

Critical Services Worker (CSW) Definition

In a Critical (Red) response level, schools and school divisions will endeavour to accommodate Kindergarten to Grade 6 children of CSWs who cannot make alternative care arrangements. Various limitations will affect the number of children of CSWs that a school can safely manage. It is understood that schools/school divisions may not have the space required to accommodate all Kindergarten to Grade 6 children of CSWs while maintaining two metres of physical distancing. Therefore, a prioritization system is needed.

Priority access will be given to health care providers. Other CSWs will be eligible and prioritized by schools/school divisions as follows:

Tier One:

- Health/Health Services
- Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Providers (all teachers, administrators, and support staff)
- Child Care Workers
- Law Enforcement
- Corrections Workers
- Fire and Paramedic First Responders
- Direct Social Services and Child Protection Workers

Tier Two:

Additional critical services workers may include people who provide critical services to Manitobans, such as front-line natural resource workers, essential supply chain staff (e.g., truck drivers delivering food, medications and other essential goods; food industry staff working in food processing plants, etc.) gas station attendants, and grocery store staff. NOTE: Schools and school divisions may also use their discretion to accommodate high-risk students in order to mitigate serious concerns of disengagement.

The In-School Environment for Kindergarten to Grade 6 Students during a Critical (Red) Response Level

Children of CSWs will be supported in remote learning in school, as per *Manitoba Education Standards for Remote Learning* at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/remote_learn_standards.pdf.

School staff will support students to participate in the real-time online instruction coordinated and scheduled by their in-class teacher(s). Students will participate in their real-time learning (synchronous – MS Teams or equivalent) from a personal or school-provided technological device in the classroom that they are assigned. Student assignments related to independent work will reflect the learning outcomes of the Manitoba curriculum. Assignments will be differentiated to meet the learning needs of students. Independent work can include reading, viewing and responding to pre-recorded videos, and engaging in project-based learning. Some supervisory support will be required. Minimum standards for student participation in real-time online instruction and independent schoolwork are outlined in *Manitoba Education Standards for Remote Learning* at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/remote_learn_standards.pdf.

Remote learning from an in-school environment requires access to a device with a camera, headphones, and Internet. The school is responsible for providing Internet access; however, if this is not possible, then print-based options (or an alternative) will be explored in discussion with the school division. These instances should be minimized to the greatest extent possible, given the critical importance of routine and daily contact. School divisions are responsible for ensuring that technology, including headphones, are accessible to all students or that an alternative plan is in place (e.g., Teacher Mediated Option [TMO], students bringing personal devices/headphones to school).

Knowing which students are children of CSWs will help schools plan and organize classroom groupings. Students who are learning remotely from the same classroom should be grouped according to the same grade and teacher, where possible. Some classrooms may have students from several different grades. Supervisors in each classroom should be familiar with the grades in their classroom and associated real-time online instruction and independent work requirements. Supervisors may be teachers, educational assistants, or special services staff.

Additional Resources

For more information on Manitoba Education's COVID-19 response, including regularly updated frequently asked questions, please see www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/latest.html.

If you have any questions regarding the COVID-19 response, please email educovid19@gov.mb.ca.