

September 4, 2020

Dear Caregivers:

**Subject: Return to School Update**

Thank you for your participation and cooperation on working through the decisions about returning to in-class school or at-home online learning. In our August 17, 2020 letter, we committed to keeping you updated as we learn new information or make changes to improve the processes around decision-making.

Earlier this week, the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), Dr. Hinshaw, made a modified Order (CMOH Order – 33-2020) regarding mask wearing upon returning to school that clarified when to wear a mask in class. The order stated the following: while in class, masks on children are **not mandatory** where tables, chairs or desks are arranged in a way that prevents students from facing each other **and** are arranged to “allow the greatest possible distance between seated persons”. However, where physical distancing is not possible, such as hallways, buses or classrooms that are not able to arrange their furniture in a way that prevents students from facing each other, **masks are still mandatory**. However, if a child chooses to wear a mask even in situations where masks are not mandatory, he or she is welcome to do so.

Children's Services continues to support in school learning for most children given the overall benefit to the long-term health and well-being of the child. However, we also know that each caregiver faces unique circumstances and needs for themselves and the children in their care.

Below you will find the current process to request an exception to in-class learning:

**Exception Request Process – Current Process:**

1. You ask your caseworker for an exception to in-class learning for this child(ren).
2. Explain your worries or concerns about **in-class learning** for this child(ren) in writing (point form is fine) to the caseworker.
3. Have a thorough discussion with the caseworker about your specific worries, considering:
  - what the child wants (if appropriate),
  - your point of view,
  - the views of others in the child's support network, if expressed,
  - any opinions expressed by the biological parent(s),

.../2

- as well as those of the school and teachers,
  - any others whose opinion is sought by the caseworker.
4. Discuss what actions can be taken and by whom to reduce or eliminate your concerns or worries for this child(ren).
  5. If you believe your worries or concerns cannot be sufficiently reduced or eliminated, ask the caseworker to forward your request for an at-home learning exception to the manager for consideration.
  6. The manager will consider your request and either approve or deny it.

It is ultimately Children's Services responsibility, as guardian, to make decisions for children and youth in our care and we must consider both the short and long-term well-being of the children and youth. However, in order to ensure that we have fully considered your opinion as the full-time caregiver impacted by these decisions, we have added additional steps for you to raise concerns you may have.

#### **Additional Steps in Exception Process – New Process**

7. If a manager denies a request for an exception allowing at-home learning, the caregiver may ask that an Associate Director reconsider the request.
8. If the caregiver is dissatisfied with the Associate Director's response, they may request a further review by the Regional Director.
9. The Regional Service Delivery Director's decision will be a final decision.

If, upon completing these additional steps you remain dissatisfied with the decision, caregivers may still file an '*Administrative Review of a Director's Decision*' requesting a formal review of decisions being made about the care of a child. Your caseworker or support worker will assist you in raising your concerns and filing an Administrative Review, should that become necessary.

We know that making a determination about a child or youth's return to school is very complex. We want to continue to hear from you about what is working and what is not and are committed to improving the supports for children and caregivers during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Policy, Practice and Program Development Branch  
Child Intervention Delivery Division