

**January 8, 2021**

**Teachers in the Fraser Health region call on local health authority to commit to improved health and safety standards in schools**

*The 12 BCTF Local Presidents that represent teachers who work within the Fraser Health region have released the following statement calling on the Fraser Health Authority to improve health and safety standards in schools.*

This week, tens of thousands of public school employees and hundreds of thousands of public school students returned to school after a two-week winter break. Over the break, families were able to limit their exposure to COVID-19, but upon the re-opening of schools on January 4, they once again face the daily risk of exposure to the coronavirus.

As the local BCTF presidents who represent teachers within the Fraser Health Authority, we are calling on Fraser Health to intensify their efforts to help make schools safer for staff, students, and the loved ones we all go home to. Combined, we represent thousands of teachers who work at hundreds of worksites. We're speaking out together in solidarity for those members who are working in the schools where health and safety standards are inadequate, inconsistent, or unsafe.

Specifically, the Fraser Health Authority needs to work with the government, the office of the Provincial Health Officer, and school districts to make the following changes:

- Continue making improvements to ensure there is timely contact tracing by the Fraser Health Authority. Some exposure notices arrive near the end of the two-week monitoring period, too late to help anyone.
- Reduce density in schools and classrooms to enable physical distancing. Desks are often less than a metre apart and many facilities have poor ventilation.
- Make masks mandatory use in all indoor spaces because physical distancing is not possible in most schools.
- Ensure educators and school staff are appropriately prioritized to receive vaccinations as soon as possible.
- Provide a clear definition and rationale for the threshold to declare an outbreak in a school.

Too many people in our schools feel unsafe. In addition, parents are worried about the health of their children and COVID-19 entering their homes because of transmission at school. More needs to be done to improve preventative measures. Many schools in the Fraser Health region are not safe enough and the status quo is unacceptable.

All along, health officials have assured British Columbians that they will adapt as they learn more about the pandemic and identify problem areas. Across the Fraser Health region, mask use is inconsistent, cohorts easily break down, and there is little room for physical distancing, especially in schools that are full or over capacity. As a result, the layers of protection do not exist in many of our schools like they do in most other indoor public spaces.

Here are some examples of the impact of COVID-19 in our schools.

- Exposure notifications are happening daily in schools throughout the Fraser Health Authority—these continued well into the first week, and even second week, of winter break.
- Close to 50 cases of COVID-19 can be linked to Earl Marriott Secondary, a large over capacity school in Surrey. If the superintendent didn't go public, it is unclear if any exposure letters or other notifications would have been sent out to staff and families.
- Two Grade 9 classes at New Westminster Secondary School were ordered to self-isolate just before the winter break.
- The entire 90-student cohort at A.D Rundle Middle School—Integrated Arts and Technology Secondary in Chilliwack was ordered to self-isolate before winter break, effectively shutting down the program.
- In Delta, 24 out of 31 school sites have had exposures, one school has had a full closure as well as several classes in other schools have had to self-isolate.
- Some schools in the region have received more than 20 exposure notices, but there is no clarity around when an actual outbreak or in-school transmission has occurred. This forces community members and workers to search for information on social media channels.
- In Burnaby, there was a likely outbreak at an elementary school where a number of staff and students in the same week contracted COVID-19, but no outbreak was declared and no classes received isolation letters issued.

It's time to make changes, improve transparency, and take decisive action to improve the safety of our schools.

As Local Presidents we are committed to working with school districts and health authority officials to get this important work done.

In solidarity,

**Stéphane Bélanger**, President, Syndicat des enseignantes et enseignants du programme francophone de la C.-B [sbelanger.sepf@gmail.com](mailto:sbelanger.sepf@gmail.com) 604-369-5710

**Jennifer Brooks**, President, Abbotsford Teachers' Union [president@abbotsfordteachers.ca](mailto:president@abbotsfordteachers.ca)  
604-854-1946

**Ken Christensen**, President, Coquitlam Teachers' Association [kchrisensen@cta43.org](mailto:kchrisensen@cta43.org) 604-936-9971

**Tanya Kerr**, President, Langley Teachers' Association [lp35@bctf.ca](mailto:lp35@bctf.ca) 604-533-1618

**Ed Klettke**, President, Chilliwack Teachers' Association [president@chilliwackteachers.com](mailto:president@chilliwackteachers.com)  
604-792-9233

**Ryan McCarty**, President, Mission Teachers' Union [lp75@bctf.ca](mailto:lp75@bctf.ca) 604- 826-0112

**Lynne Marvell**, President, Fraser-Cascade Teachers' Association [lp78@bctf.ca](mailto:lp78@bctf.ca) 604-869-9383

**Trevor Takasaki**, President, Maple Ridge Teachers' Association [trevor@mrttaoffice.ca](mailto:trevor@mrttaoffice.ca) 604-467-2111

**Daniel Tetrault**, President, Burnaby Teachers' Association [lp41@bctf.ca](mailto:lp41@bctf.ca) 604-294-8141 ext. 226

**Matt Westphal**, President, Surrey Teachers' Association [pres@surreyteachers.org](mailto:pres@surreyteachers.org) 604-594-5353

**Sarah Wethered**, President, New Westminster Teachers' Union [lp40@bctf.ca](mailto:lp40@bctf.ca) 778 789 5713

**Susan Yao**, President, Delta Teachers' Association [lp37@bctf.ca](mailto:lp37@bctf.ca) 604-946-0391