



**THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF
SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 58 (NICOLA-SIMILKAMEEN)**

ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

Stephen McNiven, B.Ed., M.A., Superintendent of Schools
Barbara Ross, C.P.A., C.G.A., Secretary Treasurer

P.O. Box 4100, 1550 Chapman Street, Merritt, B.C., V1K 1B8, Phone: (250) 378-5161, Fax: (250) 378-6263

December 2, 2021

Dear Merritt parents, caregivers, students, staff and community:

We want to thank you all again for your patience during these very stressful weeks. Today I am writing you with news of the progress we have made in planning students' return to learning, as we know many of you are eager to hear when and where students can return to school.

School District 58 is pleased to announce the reopening of Merritt Bench Elementary and Nicola Canford Elementary for their K-7 catchment students as well as for students from other schools whose caregivers provide essential services. Merritt Bench Elementary will welcome students back tomorrow, December 3, and Nicola Canford Elementary reopened this morning. The Community Learning Centre also opened today, and the School District is making plans to reopen Collettville Elementary next week. Kindergarten to Grade 5 Essential Service Support is being organized to start on Monday, December 6th

Merritt Central Elementary, Diamond Vale Elementary, and Merritt Secondary all sustained damage in the flooding and will not be reopened in the near future. To provide immediate onsite learning to upper grades, the School District has accepted the kind offer of space from the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology for grade 11 and 12 students for in-person learning beginning as soon as possible. Grades 8-10 students will continue with remote learning while the School District secures additional facilities for face-to-face learning. The School District will be preparing classroom space for in-person learning for Diamond Vale Elementary students at Merritt Bench, Nicola-Canford and Collettville. The target date for having Diamond Vale Elementary students in these classrooms is December 13th. Alternate learning space for Merritt Central Elementary students has been secured at what was once the Maranatha School at Crossroads Church. The target date for having Merritt Central students at this location is January 4th. Face to face recreation and social activity time will be offered to both Diamond Vale and Merritt Central students while classrooms are being prepared and remote learning takes place.

The School District continues to work closely with the Aboriginal Advisory Council and individual First Nations communities to plan and implement support for learners and families. The community of Upper Nicola is providing access to classroom space which will be used to support the remote learning being done by both Merritt Central Elementary and Merritt Secondary Students.

Families and caregivers will have or will receive further details from their principals about where and when student(s) in their care will be returning to learning. Please refer to these messages for specific details about your school.

We are continuing to work with our partners to ensure each student has access to learning. We are receiving considerable support from the Ministry of Education, which is providing up to 500 devices for our School District to supplement our existing supply of technology and ensure that any student who requires it will have

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the necessary remote learning supports. The School District is working hard to bring all students back to learning as quickly and as safely as possible.

Over the last number of days, staff have been assessing and preparing the undamaged schools for a return to face-to-face learning. This has included cleaning the schools, bringing in clean drinking water, and re-organizing classrooms. Our operations staff, administrators, and school staff will be provided a trauma-informed learning session facilitated by Safer Schools Together, to help returning students feel safe and supported as they adjust to being back in school. As schools reopen, staff are being debriefed and supported by our counselling team to ensure that they are prepared to welcome back students who have all experienced a great deal over the past weeks.

As well, to assist our SD58 community members during this extremely stressful time, we have hired a mental health clinician to provide any additional support that may be needed. Please contact Jane Kempston, District Principal of Student Support Services for SD58, at jkempston@365.sd58.bc.ca if you have any questions or concerns about how you can access this support if you or your children are in need.

We will continue to communicate our targets and details to the best of our ability and we want to remind our community that School District 58 is here for you. We thank every one of you for your strength and patience during these times and look forward to seeing you all again soon.

Take care.

K^wuk^wscemx^w, Limlōmt, Maarsii and thank you,

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

Stephen McNiven
Superintendent of Schools