



Presidents Council discuss back-to-school issues

The K-12 Presidents Council held a special meeting last week in advance of the full return of students to schools. Presidents compared how their respective districts were implementing updated safety plans to help curb COVID cases in schools in response to the recent surge caused by the Omicron variant. The Council provided feedback on enhanced measures being considered by the Public Health Officer and Ministry of Education and identified other possible measures that should be advocated for by CUPE.

The PHO and Ministry of Education have [released updated protocols](#) – they are [available online](#) and we provided a summary that is available on bcschools.cupe.ca.

CUPE continues to call for prioritized rapid testing for staff and students in schools, N-95 or equivalent three-layer masks be provided, prioritized vaccine boosters for school staff, support for improved ventilation, and adding regular daytime cleaning of all school environments across the province.

In support of K-12 Locals, CUPE BC President Karen Ranalleta has issued [press releases](#) over the past two weeks advocating for these measures, with emphasis on the importance of adding regular daytime custodial services in all B.C. schools. With the potential for increased absences due to illnesses that may lead to functional school closures, regular daytime cleaning is vital to stopping the spread of common illnesses (i.e., the flu and colds), and relieving pressures on staff caused by COVID related absence.

CUPE and the K-12 Presidents Council remains in close contact with the provincial government and districts through the Ministry of Education's provincial education steering committee. We will continue to advocate for our members as they work to keep B.C. schools healthy and clean for students, families, and our communities.

Mask exemptions

Well-fitted, and properly worn masks are vital to keeping our public education system open for in-person learning. A refresher for students and staff on proper usage will be provided by districts for the return to class this week.

There are, however, certain situations where a staff member or student may not be able to wear a mask and may be exempt from mandated mask use. [This guide from the B.C. government can help identifying legitimate mask exemptions in the K-12 education system](#) and provide guidance on how to deal with these situations that protect the rights and health concerns of individuals while protect public health in our schools.

Working remotely

For working remotely, CUPE has confirmed that it is up to school districts to determine whether employees can work from home. Locals who wish to advocate for this option should do so directly with their employer.

Recent CUPE BC press releases on K-12 Sector

[CUPE BC welcomes one-week delay to in-classroom education in K-12, urges additional safety measures](#)

[School support workers call for daytime cleaning to keep schools open](#)