**FISA Update – October 8, 2021**

As we enter the Thanksgiving long weekend, I would like to share FISA’s sincere appreciation to the people that ensure independent schools operate well, especially within a pandemic environment filled with the pressures brought on by uncertainty, misinformation, fear and high levels of emotion and change. I recognize the complexity that school leaders face as they navigate their communities through the maze of provincial guidelines, COVID exposures and passionate parents with strong ideological beliefs. It is well known that our young people thrive within the school communities you lead.

Despite the message that is often portrayed in the media, schools are safe, kids and families are happy to be learning with their peers and research indicates that schools play an integral role in the health and wellbeing of the children and families. I know I will be joined by many others this weekend in giving thanks for the commendable service independent schools are providing during this pandemic to support students and the public good in BC.

**Employer Vaccination Policies**
The provincial government announced on Tuesday, October 5th that BC public service employees (~ 30,000) will be required to be vaccinated by November 22nd. This requirement does not apply to government agencies, Boards and Crown Corporations, or the K-12 sector. The Ministry has no authority to mandate or require employee vaccinations in the K-12 sector. Independent School Authorities and School District Boards are the employers and will need to perform due diligence if they consider pursuing a vaccination requirement for their employees.

The PHO does have the authority to mandate a vaccine requirement, as they did with the health sector, but there is presently no indication that Dr. Henry will do so.

The Ministry has created an ad hoc committee to review this matter and FISA is representing independent schools on this committee. The committee’s goal is to provide school employers with guidelines that outline factors employers should consider as part of their employee vaccination requirement decision making process. The committee will not be providing legal advice for school employers. We encourage independent school authorities to wait for the committee’s findings to be released before finalizing any employee vaccination policies, should the authority wish to implement such a policy.

**COVID-19 School Exposures**
Many independent school leaders have reached out to members of the FISA Rapid Response Team (RRT) with COVID-19 related questions or for assistance with a school exposure. To serve schools in a proactive manner, the RRT will host a webinar on October 20th from 1:30-2:30 pm (PST) to go through the steps a school should take when they experience a COVID-19 exposure.

**Topic: Navigating a COVID-19 School Exposure 2021-2022**Time: Wed., Oct. 20, 2021 from 1:30-2:30 pm (PST)[**https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84024454538?pwd=cHl4QlpXMGZyZnBnWkQydUdSTGlGdz09**](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84024454538?pwd=cHl4QlpXMGZyZnBnWkQydUdSTGlGdz09) **Meeting ID: 840 2445 4538
Passcode: 741216**Dial by your location   +1 647 558 0588   +1 778 907 2071   +1 204 272 7920   Meeting ID: 840 2445 4538Passcode: 741216

**Student Online Safety Sessions**
Schools are encouraged to have students in grades 8-12 take part in the Ministry’s student online safety sessions which will explore practices of digital citizenship and the consequences of cyberbullying. Teachers may register on behalf of their class and stream the event for the students to view together. These sessions are offered as part of the*erase* training series.

·         Nov. 22, 2021 10:30-11:30 am (PST)
<https://event-wizard.com/SocialMediaAwarenessStudentNov222021/0/register/>

·         Nov. 22, 2021 1:30-2:30 pm (PST)
<https://event-wizard.com/SocialMediaAwarenessStudentNov222021pm/0/register/>

To view the full *erase* schedule visit <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/erase/documents/erase-training-schedule.pdf>.

**School Trespassers**
Due to some recent occurrences where schools have experienced unwelcomed guests or protesters in or near schools, the BC government is considering options that would offer a level of protection for schools.

One available remedy for independent schools facing such situations would be to access the [BC Trespass Act](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/18003#section2).

Notice requirement:

·         Signs must be posted and visible at ordinary points of access to the property

·         Notice of trespass can also be given orally or in writing

Contact a peace officer to enforce a trespass prohibited order.

**Draft K-12 Student Reporting Policy**
The Ministry has recently made available the [draft K-12 Student Reporting Policy](https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/121/2021/09/Draft-K-12-Student-Reporting-Policy.pdf). This policy references only the School Act, and therefore is not binding on independent schools. However, the Ministry welcomes all perspectives and independent school leaders would be well suited to provide thoughtful and insightful comments through the survey available here <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/studentreporting/>.

**BCTC**
The BC Teachers Council will be conducting a survey for teachers that completed their teacher education program within the last 5 years and are now teaching within the BC K-12 system. FISA encourages those certificate holders that receive a request to participate in the survey to do so. The data collected helps to enhance teacher preparation programs, the profession and ultimately the learning experience for BC learners.

**BC Premier’s Awards for Excellence in Education**
FISA encourages independent school leaders to review the [Premier’s Awards for Excellence in Education page](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/teach/excellence-in-education) and I am sure you will recognize that there are many people within your independent school community that are deserving of a nomination in several of the categories. Independent school representatives have previously won awards but the nomination numbers from our sector are low and not indicative of the high quality of people and accomplishments that exist in independent schools.

**FISA Update – October 1, 2021**

**Health and Safety**

* Recent decisions by the Vancouver and Surrey School Boards to impose mask regulations that were out of alignment with the K-12 provincial guidelines initiated some inquiries from independent schools to the FISA office. The most recent [public health order](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-face-coverings.pdf)on face coverings (Section 13 - September 28, 2021) states:

 **13***Nothing in this order prevents an operator, school or post-secondary*

*institution from having additional requirements in relation to face coverings.*

Earlier today Minister Whiteside and Dr. Henry announced that the [K-12 Guidelines](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-covid-19-health-safety-guidlines.pdf) have been amended and will require mask use for K-12 students starting on October 4, 2021.

In advance of the announcement, Dr. Rika Gustafson shared the following message with K-12 school leaders:

* + As anticipated, K-12 case counts are increasing, as those under the age of 12 are not yet eligible to receive a vaccination.
	+ The volume of testing for K-12 students has increased dramatically but the 5 -11 age group has the lowest percentage of positive diagnoses among the unvaccinated population.
	+ Transmission continues to be primarily from home or community gatherings/activities outside of school.
	+ The Delta variant is more infectious but young people are experiencing milder symptoms and illness.
	+ Getting vaccinated when accessible, staying home when you are sick, proper hand cleaning protocols and mask use are all effective ways to control the spread of COVID-19.

This information is supported by [Dr. Henry’s analysis](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/bulletin/20210929/briefingcovid192021092816.pdf) contained in today’s DM Bulletin.

* The BCCDC posted a [document](http://www.bccdc.ca/schools/Documents/Contact_tracing_schools_2021.pdf) on September 28th that reviews the contact tracing and notification process health authorities are to be using.

**Rapid Response Team**

FISA continues to provide support to independent schools experiencing a COVID-19 exposure event through our Rapid Response Team (RRT). As BC is a large province, we have a large team!

        FISA Association Leads

o   Elizabeth Moore – ISABC

o Ed Noot – SCSBC

o   Phil Hills – ACSIBC

o   Kent Dykstra – AMS

o   Sandy Marshall & Lesya Balsevich – CISBC

·         Regional Health Liaisons

o   Edgar Veldman – Northern Health

o   Peter Terpstra – Island Health

o   Art Therrien – Interior Health

o   Andrew Shirkoff – Vancouver Coastal Health

o   Stuart Morris – Fraser Health

·         Mental Health Coordinators

o   Michelle Hussey

o   Jamie Morris

·         FISA Office

o   Janet Dhanani

o   Shawn Chisholm

The ISCOVIDLead@fisabc.ca email address is monitored daily, including on weekends, by Janet and it is the main way to access RRT support when needed.

Independent school authorities that operate brick and mortar schools which are considering temporarily closing all or part of their school to in-person learning programs due to a COVID-19 situation **must consult with their local health authority and the FISA RRT in advance of making the decision** **to close** (including moving all or part of your school to online learning platforms). The final decision will remain with the school authority, but the health authority official and RRT will assist in assessing the situation. If a school is unsure of how to connect with their health authority, the FISA RRT will assist in making the connection.

First Nations Schools are welcome to contact the FISA RRT for support as needed. However, First Nation Schools are not required to submit COVID-19 exposure reports or to consult with the RRT when determining whether to close their school due to a COVID-19 situation.

**FSA Update**

When a user inputs a PEN for a student who is already enrolled at another school in the **“PEN”** field of the **“Add or Re-enroll Student(s)”** screen, a message similar to “This PEN is currently enrolled in Sample School 11-A” will be displayed. This is not an error message. It is for informational purposes only.

The user can continue to input information in the **“Legal Last Name, Legal First Name and Grade”** fields and select the **Save**button at the bottom of the page to enroll the student.

If you have questions, please contact Denise.Philadelphia@gov.bc.ca.

**FISA Update – September 24, 2021**

**COVID-19 Additional Funding**

Earlier this week, the Ministry provided notification to school authorities outlining the authority’s Recovery Plan funding amount. FISA is appreciative of the provincial government’s efforts to provide one-time additional funding to assist Group 1, 2, and 3 independent schools with costs incurred in support of health and safety compliance measures. However, we have expressed our disappointment with the government’s allocation process. Independent schools will receive 7.7 % of the $15.6M allocated to BC K-12 schools, yet independent schools serve over 13% of the student population. FISA continues to advocate for the fair and equitable funding distribution of supplemental grants that target public health initiatives for all BC children.

We take solace in the fact that the $650K provincial grant to support mental health in schools funding was allocated in an equitable and proportional manner. The Ministry requested FISA’s assistance in determining how best to use these funds. The FISA Directors voted to distribute the grant directly to independent school authorities based on FTE enrollment to use in support of local initiatives aligned with the [Key Principles and Strategies for K-12 Mental Health Promotion in Schools](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/key-principles-and-strategies-for-k-12-mental-health-promotion.pdf). The Ministry will inform school authorities in the coming days as to their mental health funding amount. Each of the FISA associations will provide a report to the Ministry as to grant usage among their member schools.

**COVID-19 Health and Safety Update**

Today’s DM Bulletin included a much-anticipated [Q & A](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/bulletin/20210924/2021-09-24---covid-update-isb.pdf)document that addresses topics such as proof of vaccination requirements, temporary school closure procedures, and symptoms of illness/return to school guidelines. This guidance is sure to be well received by the K-12 sector as it provides sought after clarity to some of the most pressing COVID-19 related concerns.

FISA anticipates that the Ministry will provide further guidance in addressing mask exemptions for students, staff, and visitors shortly. In the meantime, we remind schools that the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-covid-19-health-safety-guidlines.pdf) state that all K-12 staff and students in Grades 4-12 are required to wear a mask indoors and on school buses, with specific exceptions allowed. School leaders can use [BCCDC mask use](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/masks) messaging when communicating with their school communities as to the role that mask usage plays as one of the many layers of protection to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, especially as members of the school community may be immune-compromised or have other health sensitivities and these conditions may not necessarily be disclosed widely.

**Provincial Truth and Reconciliation Day**

One of the privileges of working in the FISA office is witnessing the good work happening in independent schools across the province. We are humbled in hearing about the various ways schools are honouring the Sept. 30th Truth and Reconciliation Day. Whether it is through connecting with a local First Nations band, listening to the wisdom of an Elder in-person or virtually, holding difficult conversations regarding Canada and Indigenous relationships - past and present, honouring the residential school survivors, or engaging in self-reflection as to your own relationship with this land and its peoples, we encourage you to consider Sept. 30th not as “The” day of Truth and Reconciliation but as “a” day of continual progress towards the goal of being the fair, friendly, and just nation that we proclaim ourselves to be.

**FISA Update - September 17, 2021**

**Health and Safety**

* After the first couple of weeks of most IS reopening, there remain many questions from the K-12 sector that require clarification. FISA is appreciative of schools that have reached out and shared their questions. Please be assured that these questions are shared by many other IS and have been shared with the BCCDC and the MoE. I request your patience as we await further clarification from these organizations. There is ongoing work happening to produce an education sector specific FAQ document, within a very dynamic and changing environment, and we anticipate this will be shared with schools as soon as possible.

* After several questions from IS on contact tracing/school notification, FISA would like to provide some clarification on the adjustments health authorities (HAs) are making:
* While the process may have changed the outcomes remain the same – everyone with a lab confirmed COVID-19 positive test result has their case investigated by contract tracers.
* All confirmed cases and close contacts will be contacted directly by their respective HA.
* Schools may not be contacted by the HA unless it is necessary to do so (a cluster at the school, requires more information on close contacts, confirmation that the school is an exposure site…).
* Vaccine status will inform the direction the HA will give to the confirmed cases and the close contacts (most likely fully vaccinated close contacts will be requested to self-monitor while unvaccinated contacts will be asked to self-isolate).
* The [COVID-19 Exposure Report form](https://fisabc.ca/independent-school-covid-19-exposure-report-form/) should be submitted to ISCovidLead@fisabc.ca on the same day that a school learns of an exposure from the HA. Exposure Reports do not need to be submitted for self-disclosures of a positive test result, until the HA confirms the school is an exposure site.
* The FISA Rapid Response Team (RRT) is available to assist schools with a COVID-19 exposure (self-disclosed or HA confirmed). Contact ISCovidLead@fisabc.ca for assistance.

* Requirements for schools in relation to the proof of vaccine (POV) order are also evolving.
* POV was instituted to encourage greater vaccine uptake in BC.
* It is not intended to disrupt K-12 learning events.
* Further information is required to determine school POV practices when normal school operations intersect with the gathering and events orders (field trips, spectators attending school events…). At this point IS are advised not to implement school specific POV policies, and to await further clarification from the MoE.

***erase* Training Opportunities**

The *Hybrid Basic Violent Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) / Basic Digital Threat Risk Assessment (DTA)* offered last year has been renamed to *Overview of the Provincial VTRA Protocol and Digital Threat Assessment*.

There are two *Overview of the Provincial VTRA Protocol and DTA*sessions arranged specifically for independent school personnel. These sessions meet the inspection requirements for Basic VTRA and Basic DTA training.

November 9, 2021 9:00am to 3:30pm (online) - Register [HERE](https://event-wizard.com/OverviewDTAVTRAOnlineNov92021/0/register/)

January 24, 2022 9:00am to 3:30pm (online) - Register [HERE](https://event-wizard.com/OverviewDTAVTRAOnlineJan242022/0/register/)

Independent school personnel are also welcome to attend the trainings open to both the public and independent school sectors, as listed on the **main erase training schedule**[**HERE**.](https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/erase/documents/erase-training-schedule-2021-22.pdf)

*erase* training is current for a maximum of 3 years. Training taken in 2018-2019, or before, is expired and needs to be refreshed this school year. For more information regarding the*erase* training requirements for independent schools visit the Ministry's[Safe & Caring School Communities](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/independent-schools/safe-caring-school-communities) webpage.

**Independent School Policies**

* FISA and the Ministry of Education collaborated over the past year to update the **STUDENT RECORDS REQUIREMENTS AND BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS (2012).** The [revised document](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/independent-schools/student_record_independent_schools.pdf) (2021) can be accessed through the [FISA website](https://fisabc.ca/), under the Policy Aids tab. The revisions pertain to Part III - ACCESS TO AND DISCLOSURE OF STUDENT RECORDS and clarify that professionals who are planning for, or delivering education, health, social or other support services to a student will be granted access (consent not required).

**2020 – 2021 FSA Results**

* Each school year the MoE facilitates a FSA Marking Monitoring process to review the accuracy of in-school FSA assessments. Several IS teachers participated in this process along with their public school colleagues this past summer. During these sessions sample FSA assessments are reviewed by several evaluators to determine the accuracy of the initial assessment. I am pleased to report that the independent school grade 4 & 7 samples were determined to be over 95% accurate. Well done! A copy of the FSA 2020/21 District Marking Monitoring Report IS is available in the ‘members only’ section of the [FISA website](https://fisabc.ca/).

**FISA Weekly Update Archive**

We have established an archive of the FISA weekly updates which is accessible through the “members only” section of the https://fisabc.ca/ website. Please contact info@fisabc.ca if you have difficulty logging in. Thank you to the principal who offered this helpful suggestion.

**FISA Update - September 10, 2021**

Welcome back!

The initial feedback FISA has received from independent schools is that the 2021 – 2022 school startup has been smoother than the previous school year, even though a changing pandemic environment still requires clarification and resolution of issues that come your way.

I do want to share my appreciation for the efforts the Ministry of Education, the BCCDC and the Provincial Health Officers put in this summer to be responsive to the changing dynamics of the pandemic. Balancing health and safety practices that provide safe school environments while being as minimally invasive as possible to ensure effective school operations – is an art!

Of course, these guidelines require implementation in schools and I salute the dedicated efforts of the leaders in independent schools who navigate these additional demands to establish safe and impactful school communities.

**Health and Safety**

* With the start of school, planning is well underway for fieldtrips that provide enhanced learning experiences for students off school grounds. With the advent of a provincial vaccine card, with requirements for people 12 years and older, many schools are looking for clarification on offsite school trips. The government’s [vaccine card website](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/vaccinecard.html#required) was updated today so please take time to review this document and any further information contained in the DM Bulletin. This website provides some direction for schools but many other, more nuanced questions still exist and FISA continues to make the Ministry of Education aware of scenarios that require clarification.

Examples of places where proof of vaccination are not required:

* Before and after school programs for K to 12 students
* Worship services
* Before and after school programs for K to 12 students
* Student events and activities in K to 12 public and independent schools
* Indoor organized events with less than 50 people, except adult sports
* Hotels, resorts, cabins and campsites
* Public libraries

Examples of places that will require a vaccine card are:

* Indoor concerts, theatre, dance and symphony events
* Gyms, exercise facilities/studios and recreation facilities
* Indoor organized events with 50 or more people. For example: Wedding receptions, organized parties, conferences and workshops

* The fall is historically when class and student photos occur and having most of the people in the picture wearing a mask can be aesthetically displeasing. Please know that the current guidelines do allow for temporary removal of masks for the purpose of identification (which can apply to class photos). Please spread students out as much as possible for the photo and, where feasible, encourage the photos to be taken outside.

* Independent schools are encouraged to establish a mask exemption request process that reinforces the Ministry’s guidance which states “All students in Grades 4 -12 are required to wear a mask" expect when an exemption is granted as per the exceptions listed on page 20 of the [guidelines](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-covid-19-health-safety-guidlines.pdf).

**Rapid Response Team**

* FISA was once again selected to facilitate the work of the Independent Schools Rapid Response Team (ISRRT). FISA will continue to receive school exposure reports and provide supports, along with your respective association COVID Leads, for schools that require direction. The ISRRT Health Authority Liaisons will also share public health updates to schools within their jurisdiction. With an eye to pandemic recovery, the ISRRT also has added two members (Jamie Morris and Michelle Hussey, FISA Mental Health Coordinators) that will focus on providing schools with mental health and wellbeing resources and virtual Pro D.

**School Closure Policy**

* In the September 3rd DM Bulletin there was an item addressing the requirement for a [School Closure Policy](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/bulletin/20210903/indepschoolclosurepolicy.pdf) for independent schools. For schools scheduled for External Inspections or Monitoring Visits this school year you will have noticed that this policy is contained within the inspection catalogues. To be clear, this policy commences in the 2021/22 school year and school authorities of **all new independent schools** **are required to develop and maintain a school closure risk mitigation plan during the first five years of operation** to minimize the impact of a potential school closure on the school community. Therefore, independent schools and authorities established previous to 2021/22 are **not** required to have a school closure policy.

**International Students**

* The Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA) created an international student portal for students arriving at the Vancouver International Airport, to streamline the entry process. The CBSA has put the [YVR Student Portal](https://www.yvr.ca/en/students) on hold. Some challenges were identified due to pandemic factors and irregular air service connections, resulting in students not arriving on the day they originally planned and had communicated via the portal.

**ArtStarts – Artists in Education (AIE) Grant**

AIE Grant applications are due to the FISA office by Friday, September 17, 2021. Group 1, 2, 3, and 4 schools are encouraged to apply to receive reimbursement of a portion of the professional artist fees for performances and workshops held in schools (in-person or virtually). Details can be found in the application form which is available [**HERE.**](https://fisabc.ca/services/schools/formsapplications/) FISA thanks the BC Arts Council and the Province of BC for their generosity in making these grants possible.

**FISA Update - September 3, 2021**

**2021 – 2022 School Start Up**

* FISA was grateful to receive a notice last week from the Ministry of Education informing us that independent schools will receive equitable and proportional funding targeting mental health supports for school communities. FISA continues to advocate for equal funding for independent schools when supplemental grants target public health initiatives that should be equitably accessed by all BC students.

These grants, mentioned in the August 27th DM Bulletin, include the final instalment of a 3-year Early Initiative Mental Health grant ($472,290) and a one-time COVID-19 Recovery Mental Health grant ($650,000). The FISA Board and the FISA Mental Health Committee (with representatives from the 5 FISA member associations) will collaborate to determine the best way these funds can support mental health and wellness in independent schools.

FISA is also aware that the DM announcement has caused some understandable  confusion for independent schools. During last year’s school start up schools received funding from both the federal and provincial governments to support COVID-19 health and safety compliance and the purchase of required items (masks, hand sanitizer, washing stations, cleaning supplies….). These above-mentioned grants are not targeted for these initiatives but instead the focus is on recovery and mental health supports.

* A separate, one-time grant to independent schools of $1.2M to support health and safety compliance measures (similar to last year’s provincial grant) will be distributed early in the school year to independent school authorities that operate Group 1, 2, and 3 schools, based on a school’s Feb. 2021 FTE enrollment.

**Provincial Outreach**

Plans were well underway for FISA to resume the Provincial Outreach and the FISA team was looking forward to visiting the different regions of the province where independent schools make a difference in the lives of their students. Unfortunately, the present public health orders and the uncertainty of future orders means it is prudent for FISA to delay face to face Pro D gatherings at this time.

My sincere appreciation to the independent schools that agreed to host these events, to Janet Dhanani for her efforts to coordinate these events and to the Pro D facilitators, Jamie Morris and Michelle Hussey, for their planning for an engaging and valuable day for independent school educators.

FISA is hopeful that the future public health status in BC will allow us to resume the Provincial Outreach sometime this school year. In the interim, the FISA Mental Health team is exploring virtual options to provide mental health and wellbeing supports for independent schools this year. More information to follow.

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**FISA Update - August 27, 2021**

**2021 – 2022 School Start Up**

* On August 23rd Dr. Henry announced the implementation of a vaccination passport for non-essential public gatherings. The BC vaccination passport requirement commences on September 13th but does not apply to regular school settings. FISA has requested further clarification on school events that may draw parents and guests to school sites and for school field trips to indoor public spaces.

* The PHO order on masks in public indoor settings does apply to K-12 schools and aligns with the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-covid-19-health-safety-guidlines.pdf)  and commenced on August 25th.

* The PHO and the Ministry of Education will be focusing on encouraging vaccinations for all that are eligible to receive one. Both the [Fraser Health Authority](https://www.fraserhealth.ca/news/2021/Aug/fraser-health-releases-data-review-of-covid-19-transmission-in-surrey-schools#.YSk1C9NKjjA) and [Vancouver Coastal Health Authority](http://www.vch.ca/covid-19/school-exposures) produced studies of COVID-19 cases in K-12 schools in their respective regions and the common theme was that vaccines are the most effective means to lowering case numbers and reducing the severity of illness for those who become infected with COVID-19. An increased provincial vaccination rate is also the most effective way to keep those unable to be vaccinated safe.

* The Ministry of Education has indicated that independent schools will not be required to supply weekly attendance reports to the Ministry at the start of this school year – as was the practice last year.

* In last week’s DM Bulletin independent schools were asked to complete their First Nations September Restart Engagement Plans. Thank you for the schools that have submitted this form. All independent schools are expected to submit this form. If your school does not enroll on-reserve Indigenous students you can respond with “does not apply” on the template provided.

**International Education Resources**

I am pleased to inform you that the Ministry of Education has added supporting materials to the Health and Wellness Guidelines on the International Education [Website](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/international-education/resources#health) - which is now live.

The new materials include:

* Documents that support student-adult discussions on 3 topic areas;
* Experiencing low mood/depression
* Feeling stressed
* Building Resilience

* A one-page student worksheet for each of the above topics, translated into Simplified Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese and;

* A Health and Wellness Resource directory.

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AIE Grant applications are due to the FISA office by Friday, September 17, 2021. Group 1, 2, 3, and 4 schools are encouraged to apply to receive reimbursement of a portion of the professional artist fees for performances and workshops held in schools (in-person or virtually). Details can be found in the application form which is available [**HERE.**](https://fisabc.ca/services/schools/formsapplications/) FISA thanks the BC Arts Council and the Province of BC for their generosity in making these grants possible.

**FISA Update - August 24, 2021**

**2021 – 2022 School Start Up**

This morning Minister Whiteside provided an update to the K-12 Health and Safety guidelines. At the end of the last school year, we anticipated a move towards guidelines that would align more closely to pre-pandemic school operations. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 fourth wave is a reality and government and public health officials are responding with guidelines that promote safe and supportive school communities.

School leaders will need to spend some time with the health and safety documents released by the Ministry to answer the more nuanced questions you may have and to inform the updates to your Communicable Disease Plans (COVID-19 plans). Here are a few of the high-level themes:

* Vaccines will not be mandated for staff or students over the age of 12 that could be vaccinated. The government will focus on sharing credible scientific information to encourage greater vaccination levels across the province.
* To start this school year, all school staff and visitors are required to wear masks indoors.
* Grades 4 – 12 are required to wear masks indoors and on school busses.
* K – 3 students will be encouraged to wear masks indoors.
* Strict physical distancing guidelines (cohorts and 2 meters personal space) will be  replaced by practices that respect personal space through effective utilization of school space and student movement. There will be no Ministry prescribed cohorts.
* There will be baseline PHO orders that will apply across the province but local health authorities may also activate medical health orders that reflect their region’s context and public health experience.
* Cleaning protocols will more closely resemble pre-pandemic practices. Regulations on building ventilation remain similar with updates on the best practice for safe air movement.
* Extra-curricular school activities will resume and will be governed by the wider provincial or local health authority orders.

Important links:

This morning’s press release: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EDUC0058-001663>

The August 24th version of the Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools: <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID_public_guidance/Guidance-k-12-schools.pdf>

The August 24th version of the Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-covid-19-health-safety-guidlines.pdf>

**FISA Update - August 20, 2021**

**2021 – 2022 School Start Up – FISA Updates**

Many independent school leaders have either returned to their leadership posts or will be doing so soon. I truly hope you all were able to take time this summer to completely disconnect, after a year that required a herculean effort from K-12 leaders throughout the province. A special welcome to any new personnel that have accepted the call to leadership for their respective independent school authorities.

**K-12 Health and Safety Guidelines**

The work of the Provincial Steering Committee and the Health and Safety Working Group recommenced on August 9th, with FISA providing an independent schools’ voice at those tables. I would like to acknowledge and commend the Provincial Health Office and the Ministry of Education for their work on the K-12 health and safety documents over the summer. When these committees concluded their work in July our goal was to provide the K-12 system with revised guidelines by the end of this week. However, with the recent increase in provincial COVID case counts and the prevalence of the Delta variant, we presently anticipate the release of these documents early next week.

It would be reasonable to expect a concerted push by the government and the education sector to encourage vaccinations for all people within the K-12 sector that are able to do so. You should also anticipate some form of mask requirements due to the present COVID-19 case numbers.

**BC Center for Disease Control (BCCDC) Updates**

The BCCDC continually analyses COVID related data to support public health initiatives and policies. You can access this information at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/data>.  What this data reveals:

* BC has experienced an impressive rate of vaccination when compared with other jurisdictions.
* A majority of recent COVID cases are the Delta variant and predominantly impact people that are not fully vaccinated.
* While recent provincial COVID cases have increased, the corresponding rate of hospitalizations and deaths are much lower.
* Regional variance exists for vaccination rates, case counts, hospitalizations and deaths, with predominantly higher rates experienced in areas with lower vaccination uptake.
* People that are fully vaccinated are far less likely to be infected with COVID and, if they are infected, the severity of their health outcomes is dramatically reduced.

**Provincial Truth and Reconciliation Day**

On August 3rd the BC government announced that provincial employees will be granted a statutory holiday on September 30th this year. This will include public K-12 school employees that are governed by collective agreements with the provincial government, many of which include language that de facto applies to federally proclaimed statutory holidays. Independent schools will need to make decisions on how their communities will honour this day of Truth and Reconciliation. Possible options to consider:

* Align your schedule with the public K-12 sector and treat the day as a provincial statutory holiday.
* Consult with local Indigenous leaders to provide insight on how to make Truth and Reconciliation meaningful in your community.
* Designate September 30th as a non-instructional day and provide your staff with Truth and Reconciliation focused in-servicing.

The Ministry of Education has reduced the minimum hours of instruction by 5 hours for the 2021/22 school year (i.e. 845 hours instead of 850 hours).

**ArtStarts – Artists in Education (AIE) Grant**

AIE Grant applications are due to the FISA office by Friday, September 17, 2021. Group 1, 2, 3, and 4 schools are encouraged to apply to receive reimbursement of a portion of the professional artist fees for performances and workshops held in schools (in-person or virtually). Details can be found in the application form which is available [**HERE.**](https://fisabc.ca/services/schools/formsapplications/) FISA thanks the BC Arts Council and the Province of BC for their generosity in making these grants possible.

**International Education Scholarship**

Due to budget constraints some of the BC international student scholarship programs that previously existed will not be available for the 2021 – 2022 school year.However, I am pleased to inform you that the**International Student Ambassador Pathways Scholarships** will continue to be available for independent school international students in 2021 - 2022. These scholarships are for international students graduating from Grade 12 at a BC school and transitioning to an approved BC post-secondary institution. Deadlines for this scholarship are fast approaching and further details and the application form can be found through the following [link](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/scholarships/scholarships-awards/bc-international-student-ambassador).

The application forms have been modified from previous years and are now quite streamlined. If you have any questions on the application process, they can be directed to bccie@bccie.bc.ca.

*The FISA office acknowledges that the land on which we gather and work is the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.*

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