Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools

Oct. 30, 2020
Superintendent's Update: Students, Parents/Legal Guardians, and Staff

Although winter will be here before long, it is a relief to know that warmer weather is expected to return briefly this weekend. With temperatures forecasted to reach double-digits on the positive size of zero, why not take advantage of the opportunity and spend time outdoors? Although we continue to face challenging times, we turn to Jesus Christ, who we can be assured loves and cares for us always. "*So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16).

It is always fun to see the creativity of our students and staff as they come to school and work dressed in Halloween costumes. While festivities certainly looked different this year, our schools still engaged in Halloween-themed activities this week, following all public health guidelines and Division policies relative to COVID-19. You and your child(ren) can enjoy many of your favourite seasonal activities safely this weekend by taking some simple precautions regarding trick-or-treating, handing out candy, and small gatherings. If you are feeling ill, even if symptoms are mild, please stay home.

As of this notice, our Division has 22 confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 within our Division since the start of the school year, the majority of which were confirmed in the past three weeks. Our staff are working closely with Alberta Health Services (AHS) caseworkers to help keep our students and staff safe.

Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord, St. Albert Public Schools, and Sturgeon Public Schools have made the joint decision to postpone all school-based extracurricular junior and senior high athletics in St. Albert and area until at least the end of 2020. This decision was not made lightly and is a result of the significant increase in COVID-19 cases in our communities. We know that athletics are important to many of our students, and we are hopeful that we may be able to provide our student-athletes with the opportunity to participate and compete later this school year. We will monitor the situation in the coming months to determine if it is safe to resume athletics, with COVID-19 safety measures in place, in the new year. We are grateful for our partnerships with our sister jurisdictions as we work collaboratively to keep our students safe.

On Oct. 26, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health announced new public health measures in the Edmonton Zone. First, the province has implemented a mandatory 15-person limit on all social and family gatherings. At the end of November, the government will reassess this temporary limit, which will be lifted when daily case numbers are down and the spread is sufficiently reduced. Additionally, the province has said that two voluntary public health measures remain in place. First, cohorts should be limited to no more than three: your core household, your school, and one other sport or social cohort (young children who attend child care can be part of four cohorts). Second, non-medical masks should be worn in all indoor work settings, except when alone in workspaces, such as offices or cubicles, where one can be safely distanced from others or if appropriate barriers are in place. We ask that everyone follow the recommended protocols from Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health in an effort to mitigate virus transmission, particularly with the current surge in cases throughout the province.

I remind you to monitor your child(ren) for any signs or symptoms by using the Daily Health Screening Questionnaire, which includes updated isolation guidelines as of Nov. 2, 2020, and to complete this checklist **every** morning, **BEFORE** sending your child(ren) to school each morning. If your child is ill or has any symptoms, even if they seem mild, please keep him or her at home, call 8-1-1, and follow all instructions for testing and isolating. Thank you for continually reinforcing how important it is to follow all health and safety protocols. AHS's *Guidance for Parents of Children Attending School and/or Childcare* provides helpful information and answers to frequently asked questions.

On Oct. 13, Alberta Education announced that diploma exams for high school students will be optional for October and November 2020. The letter, along with Questions and Answers from Alberta Education, that I had previously sent to impacted families, offers key considerations to help students and parents/legal guardians make informed decisions that are right for them. Students are encouraged to talk to their teachers about writing diploma exams.

As I mentioned last week, schools have sent a survey to all parents/legal guardians to find out if they would like their child(ren) to switch from online to face-to-face programming or vice-versa. The deadline to complete this survey is **Oct. 31, 2020**. Parents/legal guardians will receive notification from the school principal, by **Nov. 5, 2020**, regarding the program they wish their child(ren) to be in.

We are excited to announce the launch of the new GSACRD Voice website. GSACRD Voice works to promote positive mental health within our five schools in Morinville and Legal. The new website will be a valuable resource for our students and families within these communities.

On Oct. 26, our Board of Trustees congratulated 15 students in our Division on being nominated for the 2020-2021 *Honouring Spirit: Indigenous Student Awards*. Sponsored by the Alberta School Boards Association, in collaboration with the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta School Councils' Association, and the Alberta Teachers' Association, these prestigious awards recognize First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students across the province who model strength and commitment in the pursuit of their education by embracing their gifts, strengths, and cultural traditions. Congratulations to each one of these well-deserving students!

As you know, the situation around COVID-19 is changing rapidly. We continue to follow the direction of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and all levels of government on preparedness planning and will update our *School Re-Entry Plan* as required. We will keep you informed through these weekly notices, our *Parent Guidebook for School Re-Entry: 2020-2021*, our website and social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) platforms, and other communication channels. Your child(ren)'s teacher(s) and school principal(s) can best address your concerns as they apply to your child(ren's) school. We encourage you to follow all public health guidelines, including the new voluntary measures that Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health announced last week. Credible information about COVID-19 is available from Health Canada, the Government of Alberta, AHS, and the World Health Organization.

We encourage everyone to view Archbishop Smith's message for Catholic Education Sunday 2020, which takes place on November 8 this year. We are grateful for out Catholic schools, and we ask that students, staff, and families unite in praying this Novena for Catholic Education Sunday (also available in French), asking for the Holy Spirit's intercession for Catholic education throughout Alberta, daily from October 29 through November 6.

We celebrate All Saints' Day on Sunday, a solemn holy day of the Catholic Church that is commemorated annually on November 1. The day is dedicated to the saints of the Church - all of those who have attained heaven. "This invites us to turn our gaze to the immense multitude of those who have already reached the blessed land, and points us on the path that will lead us to that destination" (Pope John Paul II, All Saints' Day 2003).

As we look forward to the weekend, may we all care for one another and work together to ensure that our children have an enjoyable, safe, and healthy Halloween. I leave you with my sincere wish for all of our students, staff, and families, stated so eloquently in the Third Letter of the Holy Apostle John:

"Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health,
just as it is well with your soul" (3 John 2).

Blessings!

Sincerely,

Dr. Clint Moroziuk
Superintendent of Schools