

LEADING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY THROUGH A PANDEMIC

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Wednesdays @ 2 pm MDT (Saskatchewan)
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Episode 6: A Glimpse at the First Day of School this Fall - May 6, 2020

What kinds of challenges and changes will there be when we return to school?

- There has been a heavy focus on physical environments when it comes to reopening schools such as the classroom layout, space between desks, number of students in classrooms, entrances, one way hallways, bathroom monitors, bussing, etc.
- We need to keep in mind that there is mutually influencing effect between physical environment and student learning
 - Physical environment in which students learn has a direct effect on the way students learn
 - Educators and policy makers need to think about how altering the physical space of a classroom will affect the way we teach
- Most physical distancing policies in schools that we have seen from places like Denmark and Quebec have to do with limiting activities to just what happens during the normal school day (8:30-3:30)
 - A key component of what students learn, in particular socially and emotionally, happens through extra-curricular activities. How will this affect learning opportunities for students?
 - Some kind of assessment needs to be done to determine what kind of learning and teaching needs to be the focus. How much of a focus needs to be on numeracy and literacy?
- Some possibilities for how school will be set up include:
 - Split days or alternating days
 - Hybrid-flexibility schooling - some students come into the classroom but the class is simultaneously streamed via webcast for those students who are at home
 - Suspension of common areas
 - Limiting or cancelling recess - reduce chances of contact and mingling
 - Partial closures, staying in home rooms

- In Denmark they have started having siblings put into the same classes together to limit the possibility of transmission

What needs to be done?

- Decision and policy makers need to give some serious thought about the teachers
 - Teachers will be asked to completely change the way they teach and also be cognisant that Covid-19 may be entering the classroom potentially harming the teacher, depending on their level of vulnerability to the virus
- A BMC Public Health study concludes its study from 2016 by saying “little information is available to schools to develop policies and procedures on social distancing”
- Governments and ministries of education needs to set up a task force to start to create a framework that takes into consideration perspectives from educators, parents, and health experts on what school needs to look like and how this will affect school
 - Students need to feel safe, parents need to feel confident in terms of their children's wellbeing and potential to learn, and teachers need to feel safe and not like they have to solve this new challenging learning dynamic all by themselves
- We need a integrated and holistic plan/framework that can be used to guide the work that school divisions and jurisdictions need to do
 - Experts needed from all affected parties - academics, practitioners , teachers, school leaders, and experts from infectious disease and public health