



School District No.59 (Peace River South)

November 26, 2021

Dr. Jong Kim
Chief Medical Health Officer
Northern Health Regional Office
Suite 600, 299 Victoria St.
Prince George, BC V2L 5B8

Re: COVID notifications and process

Dear Dr. Kim;

The Board of Education of School District No.59 (PRS) is requesting an increased level of transparency from Northern Health in regard to COVID notifications. The Board requests Northern Health to publicly define how their approach to posting general notifications of COVID exposures, clusters and outbreaks in schools differs from other health authorities. Furthermore, a clear definition of a “cluster” is needed and should be provided on the Northern Health website.

We believe that transparency is not being achieved, because our communities do not understand how Northern Health’s approach differs from other health authorities. Currently, Northern Health’s process for COVID notifications does not align with the definition from the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) as outlined in the British Columbia COVID Situation Report for K-12 schools. In that report, it states, *“Notification of a potential exposure does not mean disease transmission in the classroom or learning environment has occurred.”* It is our understanding Northern Health continues to use “exposure” in their notifications to report when transmission has occurred in a school setting and the risk of transmission is still present. The varying information is creating confusion for parents in our district as health authorities across the province are defining and reporting exposures differently.

If Northern Health intends to continue with the current approach to school exposure notifications, it is crucial that your much narrower definition be clearly explained to the public, in order to provide the necessary context. Lacking that context, we believe that our inexplicably low number of school exposures compared to regions with higher vaccination rates gives our communities an unrealistic perception of the pandemic’s real risks and impacts.

In addition, it is crucial to reduce turnaround times for testing, results and notifications, especially in smaller communities. To date, the district has received minimal notifications and those that have been received are listed as exposures only. If the current process is for the district to only receive notifications when there has been known transmission in school settings, it is important to provide that information to our school communities as quickly as possible for the health and safety of our staff,

students, and communities. With the delay of information, parents are currently being left to rely on other parents sharing health information which creates inequity in terms of access to information.

School staff, students and parents need to be assured that public health is following up on COVID activity in their community in a way that is both timely and transparent. We understand the challenges faced by Northern Health and the tireless effort of staff from both Northern Health and the school district to keep our schools and communities safe; we look forward to increased clarity on the notification and reporting process.

Sincerely,



Chad Anderson
SD59 Board Chair

Cc: Cathy Ulrich, Northern Health President and Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Corneil, Northern MHO
Dr. Kling, NI MHO
Dr. Fumerton, NW MHO and Acting NE MHO