



**THE WINNIPEG SCHOOL DIVISION**  
1577 Wall Street East, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 2S5  
Telephone: (204) 775-0231  
FAX: 774-6211

BETTY EDEL  
CHAIR OF THE BOARD

August 11, 2021

Honourable Cliff Cullen  
Minister of Education  
Room 168 Legislative Building  
450 Broadway  
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Cullen:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Winnipeg School Division, I am expressing our concern on the recent Return to Safe School Plan that will allow all Kindergarten to Grade 12 students to return to full-time in-class learning on September 7, 2021, at the Yellow (Caution) level. More importantly, that the Province of Manitoba has removed the Public Health Order that required the use of masks for students, staff and visitors in schools.

Although, the provincial government has indicated that they will reassess and monitor the use of masks prior to the start of school, it was also stated that school boards may determine what measures are appropriate to maintain the health and safety of students and staff, including the mandatory use of masks in schools.

Once again, the provincial government has neglected to stabilize the education system for our children and youth by shifting the responsibility to school boards to determine whether masks should be mandatory in schools. I find it discouraging that the province would not provide leadership and ensure consistency across the province to maintain the safety and health of our students and staff, especially, when there is scientific evidence that supports the arrival of a fourth wave of the new Delta variant that is highly contagious amongst unvaccinated children and youth in Manitoba.

As you are aware, the province has confirmed that only two-thirds of children aged 12 to 17 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and about 52 percent have received both doses, which does not support the concept of "herd immunity" within the school communities. In addition, children under the age of 12 years old will be fully exposed to contracting the virus, as the immunization is not available at this time. The province has also confirmed that it is expected that COVID-19 infections will continue to occur in schools and yet rather than mitigate and reduce the risks of transmission of the virus by simply extending the mask mandate a few more months, families are expected to risk their health on a daily basis and hope their child does not contract a variant of the COVID-19 virus. It is important to recognize that WSD has approximately 32,000 students with various levels of medical and health requirements and may be vulnerable to the virus.

The members of the Board of Trustees are requesting that the Minister of Education reconsider and mandate masks for all students in schools, as well as staff and visitors in an effort to reduce the spread of the Delta Variant and maintain our health and safety.

It would be appreciated if a response could be provided no later than August 20, 2021.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "E. Edel".

Betty Edel  
Board Chair