

Dear staff and families,

Welcome to the 2022-2023 school year. I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable summer and I am excited to welcome students back.

I would like to introduce myself to all of you in my new role. My name is Cassandra Kelly and I am the Assistant Deputy Minister for Schools and Student Services. With more than 26 years of Yukon government experience in 5 different departments, my work is informed by strong working relationships with a number of First Nations governments and partners. Excited to contribute and continue learning from the Yukon education system, I am also looking forward to working and learning alongside our colleagues and partners in the First Nation School Board as they realize their vision for learning in Yukon.

The year has many promising changes ahead. [School Board elections](#) are taking place on November 7 to elect School Board trustees to the First Nation School Board and Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon (CSFY). As well, we are making our schools more inclusive, safe and caring learning environments as we work on completing the actions in the [Safer Schools Action Plan](#) and implementing [RISE: reimagining inclusive and special education](#).

Managing illness, including COVID-19

We are returning to a much more normal school year. We know the pandemic has had unintended effects on students. We are focused on a two-year recovery phase that supports learning, mental health and wellness for all. You can learn more about our [recovery plan here](#).

As we continue to learn to live with COVID-19, we have the opportunity to make decisions based on our personal risk. The Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Ranade, issued a statement yesterday on what students, teachers, staff and families can expect for the year ahead.

Parents and caregivers should use their best judgement to determine whether a child is well enough attend school or other activities. Children who are ill – regardless of symptoms – should stay home to rest, recover, and avoid infecting others. Observe and talk to your child frequently to see if they have new or worsening symptoms. You may find this updated [stoplight guidance](#) helpful.

We will continue to use the well-established process for school-based surveillance and reporting communicable diseases. This process requires principals to notify YCDC when there are an above-average number of absences due to reported illness. We know that these processes work from years of putting them into practice.

We are not re-instating mask requirements. The decision to wear a mask at school, on the bus or any public setting, is a personal one. Vaccination for children is not mandatory, but is encouraged, and remains the best way to protect against severe outcomes from COVID-19.

You can see the CMOH's [full statement here](#).

We are committed to keeping schools open and safe for kids – especially for those who depend on a school as a reliable safe space. The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health and wellbeing of our educators, students, and their families, and we will continue to seek more and better ways to support each other.

We look forward to the 2022-23 school year ahead.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Kelly

Assistant Deputy Minister of Schools and Student Services
Department of Education
