



Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education

Dear parents and caregivers,

As the holidays approach, I wanted to take the time to introduce myself and let you know what a true privilege and honour it is to serve as your Minister of Education.

Throughout my life I have advocated for people and communities. For more than 20 years I've worked for unions and community organizations, both provincially and nationally, on a broad range of health policy and labour relations issues. Most recently, I was the secretary-business manager and chief spokesperson of the Hospital Employees' Union, which represents more than 50,000 health care social service workers across our province. I have a deep regard for the value of education and the important role of our education system in providing support and equity of opportunity to our children. We know the importance of keeping students, staff and everyone at our schools safe.

This year we have all faced challenges like never before. I'd like to thank you for supporting your children and each other during this incredibly challenging time. You rallied behind your children when we took lessons online in the spring at the start of the pandemic, and you have continued to be vital partners in education as we reopened schools in June and again in September. I've spoken to many families who have told me about the struggles they've faced over the past nine months keeping kids engaged and supported. I have also heard from students, families and staff that being in the classroom – connected to teachers and classmates – has been invaluable.

We know that school is the best place for most students to learn, and for their social and emotional wellbeing. While school doesn't look the same this year, we are all committed to ensuring all students continue to learn and are fully supported.

As we work together to fight COVID-19, we're going to miss our usual ways of connecting with each other over the holidays. I know this will be difficult for all of us, but as Dr. Henry often says, this is for now and not forever. There is light and hope on the horizon with the arrival of the first vaccines in B.C. this week. It's an important reminder for all of us, that the science we learn in school are the building blocks that transform lives.

I wish you all the best as you find meaningful ways to celebrate over the winter break. In the new year, we look forward to having students back in the classroom as we continue to work with all of our partners to provide a safe and healthy school environment for all our students and staff.

Have a safe, healthy and happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Whiteside". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education