

Parents, students and staff,

It's been an extraordinary start to what is our new reality. I had reached out last week with a message to say what can you expect in week one and now I'm doing the same about what we have done so far and what you can look forward to in week two and ahead.

Kids miss school and they miss their friends and teachers.

We don't have a one-size fits all system and that is one of the strengths of British Columbia. That is why you are going to see learning rolling out in varying ways and at different rates.

Only 4 days ago, schools were asked to come together and make a plan which requires rethinking everything in absence of the ability to bring your students together face to face. New tools needed to be embraced, new resources considered, new methods, new mindsets and more. This week has represented a fundamental change in how education is delivered, and schools have responded.

Schools have revamped their existing work structures. They are meeting online, they are collaborating in a virtual world, they are trying new tools and approaches. One thing we are experiencing is that at the same time that some teachers are eager to roll some early instruction out to parents this week, they are also trying to not overwhelm parents with too much information too fast. Part of this tension is at the core of our message to our education system and to our community. Please be patient, slow and steady wins the race. First comes reaching out and connecting, then learning can begin in stages a little at a time.

In these early days, what has emerged is the unbelievable care that our schools have for their students and the community. We have seen enormously touching examples where schools have come together, have reached out to their community just with a message of care and connection in these early days. It is heartwarming and it shows why all of us went into education, because we care.

In some cases, people will see some amazing and innovative instructional examples and there will be a pressure to keep up. Once again, every one of us entered this week in a different place in our comfort-level with online tools. While we celebrate and marvel at those innovative ways, we also are reminded that the single most powerful difference in the lives of our learners is the classroom teacher. It is your human connection that is at the heart of what we do. Simply reaching out, letting families know you're there and you'll be working with them provides enormous confidence and support. It's week 1.

For parents, we also know it's a new world. You have jobs, you now have your children at home and you have to interpret the information coming your way and you too have to reinvent and re-imagine what your weeks look like all in an era of such uncertainty in the community from the economy, to the ability to move about normally, to our own health. It is a challenging time.

As we move to week two, parents and students will see more information coming from schools. Lessons will slowly begin to come your way and you will be asked as well to work with new tools and methods that require new learning. One of the reasons we are asking schools to move slowly and steadily in rolling out instruction is so that we don't overburden our parents who need time to adjust as well. One further thing to imagine is that our employees are feeling this new reality as well. We are trying to do our regular jobs, at home, and also to teach our own children. We are living what thousands of our parents are living, we get it.

Finally, for those of you who know Stephen Lewis, a much admired national figure who was chosen to be the United Nations Special Envoy in Africa. Stephen reminds us often that in his travels and work what he discovered was that what children around the world wanted most was a school. I think we are all now seeing the value and importance that our public education system has, not just to our learning, but to our very ability to care for each other in challenging times.

I know our district and our community are coming together. I see it all around even with the small things like people banging pots on the streets at 7:00 at night in support of our health care workers. We're in this together, we will indeed see the other side and know that every single day, all those who make up the Surrey School District are there at your side.

*Supt. Jordan Tinney*