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February 2, 2021 - Principal's Message, Mrs. Kathy McTaggart

Quarter 3 has begun,

Yesterday marked the first day of quarter 3 at Ponoka Secondary Campus. We have now completed $\frac{1}{2}$ of the 2020/2021 school year. Way back in September (it feels like a year ago) I had thought that by now we would be pretty much back to regular school by now, I was certainly wrong about that.

As we are in the midst of the 1 year mark of being affected directly by the COVID-19 virus, much has been learned about the virus and how it acts and spreads and as the medical system learns more information, direction to the K-12 school system evolves. I just wanted to send a letter to all of you explaining a couple of the new procedures rolled out by Alberta Health Services that schools are now trying to navigate.

As you know, our school did have another positive COVID-19 case. We were made aware of the case at around 6:30pm on Sunday, January 31. With this latest case we were thrust into implementing these new guidelines, and with it many questions from our school community. Thank you to the students and parents asking these questions and continuing to be active and engaged in your schooling and well being. Our social studies teachers will be proud that we have so many critical thinkers in our midst.

Isolation - Change in Regards to Teachers

Alberta Health Service sent out an updated Back-to-School During COVID-19 document on January 15, 2021. That document contained the following information:

What is considered a close contact in a school?

Generally, all students who share a classroom with a student who was infectious with COVID-19 are considered close contacts. This is a cautious approach to identifying close contacts in order to

minimize the risk of transmission. Children in a classroom are considered part of a cohort for contact tracing.

Teachers and other school staff are considered on a case-by-case basis:

- Teachers who regularly interact within 2 metres with the students in their class would be considered as part of the cohort. If there was a case of COVID-19 in the classroom, the teacher would be considered a close contact and required to quarantine as they are part of the classroom cohort.

- **If a teacher or school staff member can confirm that they were not within 2 metres of their students for more than 15 minutes cumulative during the COVID-19 case's infectious period, they would not be considered part of the classroom cohort. This teacher or school staff member is not a close contact of the case and does not require quarantine.**

- If the teacher or staff member tests positive and can confirm they were not within 2 metres of any of their students for more than 15 minutes cumulative during their infectious period, the students would not be considered close contacts.

Based on this definition, during this last case, the school determined we had 1 staff member who did need to isolate and another who did not. This determination is based on the description above and through a discussion with the staff member. We will err on the side of caution but also are thankful that in some instances, we are able to keep staff in front of our students.

Isolation Requirements for Students and Staff - Change in regards to who must isolate

Alberta Health Services recently released an updated set of detailed guidelines to assist in managing a number of important aspects of COVID-19. This guideline includes clarifying how schools are expected to deal with a situation where an individual had previously tested positive for COVID-19 and has since been identified as a close contact. Specifically, the guideline states:

“If a resolved case is identified as a close contact (ie. they have had a new exposure unrelated to their previous infection), no repeat quarantine is required if the exposure is within 90 days of their previous positive test result AND they are asymptomatic”. ([COVID-19 Public Health Disease Management Guidelines - January 14, 2021](#) - page 20)

Superintendent Lovell has consulted extensively with Alberta Health Services - Communicable Disease Control to confirm this requirement. Moving forward, if there is

a confirmed case of COVID-19 at PSC, and a student or staff member had tested positive within 90 days prior to a new exposure, they will not be required to isolate for 14 days. The reason for this is also outlined below:

“Despite millions of COVID-19 cases worldwide, surveillance and investigations have only identified few confirmed cases of re-infection so far. Although currently, it is still unclear whether resolved cases are definitively immune to re-infection, available evidence suggests that most of these individuals would have a certain degree of immunity for at least 90 days after initial diagnosis of COVID-19.” [COVID-19 Public Health Disease Management Guidelines - January 14, 2021](#) - page 20.

Armed with this knowledge, I appreciate your understanding regarding this change and requirement for our school to follow AHS guidelines. Student and staff safety remains our top priority and we will continue to ensure our safety protocols align with provincial requirements and direction.

Grad 2021 Update

Our first bottle drive fundraiser was a success and raised a grand total of \$1909.45. Our 2nd fundraiser this year will be selling flowers from County Gardens & Greenhouse. Orders can be made through any graduate starting next week. If you would like a graduate to contact you to take an order please let us know.

A reminder - **Grad Photos** are February 23 and 24. Sign up and payment will all be online this year. Links have been shared out, please ensure you sign up for a spot. All Grade 12 students were sent a google form asking for their input on this year's motto, theme and song. Entries will be accepted until tomorrow at 3pm.

Kathy