



Delta District Parent Advisory Council (Delta DPAC)

C/O Delta School Board
4485 Harvest Drive, Delta, BC, V4K3C9
Email: deltadpac@deltasd.bc.ca
Website: dpac.deltasd.bc.ca

Input on School Reopening 2020-2021

August 19, 2020

Dear Superintendent, Administrative Teams and Board,

Beginning on August 15th Delta DPAC solicited comments, issues and concerns from the parents in the District. We utilized a number of means to reach as many parents as quickly as possible. These means included:

1. Direct email to all attendees of DPAC meetings in the past school year
2. Direct email to all school principals to forward the request to parents
3. Two separate coverages in local newspapers
4. Posting on multiple community bulletin boards in Tsawwassen, Ladner and North Delta
5. Word of mouth

Following the request, we received an unprecedented number of responses. In this short time, we received over 300 parent responses, representing between 400-500 students. It is very clear that the current global crisis is deeply affecting families and they are very concerned about the health of their loved ones and the health of their community. This concern for health is not limited to the obvious COVID-19 pathology, but is also deeply rooted in concerns for mental health.

When soliciting feedback, we had no set format for response. This means that we received a wide array of responses ranging from singular concerns to multiple, complex concerns. We have endeavoured to categorize responses into comprehensible categories to assist with the short timelines and high pressure; however, I would like to share my personal observations on the responses received:

The parents in the District submitted responses that showed a deep concern for their children, but they were generally sympathetic and understanding of the magnitude of the task in front of the School District. I encountered so many heart-felt and heart-breaking letters conveying children's angst and families' struggles. Most often, they expressed great uncertainty. ***In spite of this the majority have passed their trust on to you with their most important people*** – not just the kids, but those in the children's home, such as elderly grandparents, and family members who may have underlying health issues.

It is with no envy that I view your position. You are charged with an historical decision about how to move forward that is not only unprecedented in modern history, but has the potential to produce grave results in the worst case, and in the best case will reverberate through the remaining academic careers of our young ones.

As a parent group, we wish you well. We have faith that you will take our concerns to heart. Do your best to protect our children, our teachers and staff and yourselves – doing so both cautiously and boldly.

It is a privilege for me to present a summary of responses, with commentary below each, on the following pages.

Thank you.
Joe Muego DPAC chair



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Summary or Parent Responses

Statistics:

Written submissions: approximately 320
Representing: approximately 450 children

72% of respondents noted Elementary age children
26% of respondents noted Secondary age children
32% of respondents did not identify age or grade

Concerns and Comments:

**10% of respondents were worried
about losing their “spot” in specific schools**

Commentary: Most of these families were either cross boundary or cross district. Most of them know the current policy, and are worried, if they chose other options, that they will not be able to return, or secure spots for younger siblings in the same schools.

**13% of respondents favour
“getting on with it” – return to “normal”**

Commentary: This group of parents felt there was enough being done throughout the region for our safety already and were anxious to have the students return to as much “normal” as possible. There was an undercurrent of pressure on these parents for their own work situations, child-minding and uncertainty.

13% of respondents had concerns about staff

Commentary: These concerns were varied. They included the personal well being of teachers and staff, but also showed concern about teachers needing to perform as quasi-health professionals as well. Other questions: Are teachers tested? How will TOC, EAs and volunteers be handled - will they be restricted to areas or schools? How can we expect teachers to differentiate between a child with allergies, and one who may be sick without stigmatizing? Etc.

**15% of respondents are considering
Distance Learning, Home Quest or Home Schooling**

Commentary: For those families considering, their concerns ranged from waitlists to resources, to social disconnection.

**18% of respondents felt
extreme pressure relating to work, childcare and uncertainty**

Commentary: This category spanned from single parents, particularly of young children, as well as dual income families, who did not have workplace flexibility. While there is a global understanding of the crisis, respondents in this category were left exasperated with the uncertainty and were worried about their employment.



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25% of respondents were worried about underlying health issues

Commentary: Respondents here related underlying health conditions with the child, parent or grandparents at home. Because of their scenarios, many have restricted their bubbles significantly in the months of the pandemic. Many feel the risk is too great. This has been a terrible conflict for them – trading academic, mental and social health for physical health.

31% of respondents cited serious mental health and socialization concerns

Commentary: Many families expressed serious concern for the students' mental well-being. Anecdotes of children from elementary to seniors in high school having emotional “break downs” are plentiful. Some of the younger are actually fearing death. Some of the older feel entirely disconnected from their friends, teachers and community. There is a sense of isolation and in some cases hopelessness.

Editorial: *It is easy to assume the children (especially secondary) share our adult resiliency, but this is not the case. They are still finding their voices, their personalities and their confidence. They are still in emotionally nascent, developing states at the best of times as they try to fit in, and feel like they are valued and belong to a group. They have been challenged since March and many are showing signs of their limitations in their ability to cope with these unprecedented pressures. This challenge in resiliency seems commensurate with their age and emotional maturity – but there are serious, potential long-term effects that we are all worried about.*

35% of respondents had concerns about cohorts

Commentary: Respondents in this category had very legitimate concerns, with most being relating to inadvertent bubble increases. For example, families with multiple children have an automatically exponential (literally) increase in their bubble size. This coupled with staff or others will inflate exposure well beyond many parents' risk tolerance.

There are also concerns about their child reconnecting with friends and peers to shore up their eroding disconnection. This is especially true in high school, where the previously shifting blocks allowed for many social connections and variety. Families are worried about their children being “stuck” in groups where they might not feel happy and thus inadvertently compound an already dire situation. Families in secondary also have concerns about maintaining interest and focus if there is a switch to a two subject - quad system for example.

There was a feeling of lack of control or confidence during non-classroom time, lunch hour, recess etc. that students would all be able to follow the new social distance rules themselves – especially at elementary.

Other concerns included syncing up family schedule for those with multiple kids or those that spanned elementary and secondary, if there are varying or staggered schedules.

More pointed questions relating to cohorts: If a child becomes sick (even a cold), is the whole cohort in quarantine? What about staff? How long? Do they come to the school? Do students and staff need a negative test to return?



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47% of respondents had concerns with health measures and infrastructure

Commentary: This category spanned many concerns from behavioural to physical. Many respondents worried about air quality and ventilation in schools. Many were strong advocates for mask wearing, but some had concerns about the young ones grappling with the discipline and comfort of mask wearing.

Many expressed concerns about handwashing, and how much time this would take for elementary kids, while some expressed concern there was not enough handwashing stations in schools to allow children to wash as often as recommended.

There were many questions about sanitation plans for inside and outside schools. For example, will the playgrounds be sanitized between cohorts? What is the frequency and protocol for the classroom cleaning? Will parents need to provide masks and sanitizing supplies?

57% of respondents favoured some type of hybrid learning, gradual or staggered entry or part-time

Commentary: The majority of parents are expecting or hoping for creativity in delivery that provides instruction, but minimizes exposure. Many embraced aspects of the delivery at the end of last school year. There is a recognition of the finite staff resources to do both in person and online learning.

Many respondents favoured the idea of part time in class, typically on an am/pm schedule. Many felt that if something simple could be devised they could adjust.

While there was a strong preference for hybrid learning, there were also concerns about some families' access to technology.

EPILOGUE:

The summary of concerns was challenging because of the personal nature of the responses. As mentioned, many put tremendous effort and thought into their responses. While I, as the DPAC chair, was privileged that they would share these concerns with me, I am behooved to further collate these submissions and send to the District under separate cover. There may be specific concerns or requirements, that are beyond the scope of work of DPAC and these families should have their actual words and voices considered by staff.

END OF SUMMARY