



Aurora Preparatory Academy COVID-19 Response: Proposed Reopening for the 2021-2022 Academic Year

The following document - which focuses primarily on operational guidance, procedures, and protocols - is based heavily on the Government of Ontario's *COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools (2021-2022)* and builds upon *Aurora Preparatory Academy COVID-19 Response: Procedures and Protocols for the 2020-2021 Academic Year*, which is available on our website. It is also supplemented by a compilation of the best practices adopted by local private schools, adjusting where necessary for the unique circumstances of Aurora Preparatory Academy and its families. It should be noted this proposal is based on the best information currently available and is subject to modifications as directed by the government and public health officials. Specific information on changes to protocols and procedures will be made available to families as soon as they become available.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to build upon the practices established during the last academic year to allow students to return to class while remaining healthy and safe. To the greatest extent possible, we have modified and developed them according to federal and provincial mandates, thereby enhancing student education and experience while attending Aurora Preparatory Academy.

Our students will return to full-time studies, five days per week, remaining in one cohort for the full day. Cohorted classes will stay together and with one teacher, where possible. Students *may* temporarily be placed into groups with students from other cohorts, if necessary.

Members of different cohorts can interact outside with distancing encouraged or inside with distancing and masking. Specialized education staff, such as French and art teachers, will go into classrooms, while our music teacher will conduct classes in a space separate from students' homerooms.

Remote Learning

During the last academic year, APA was pleased to offer a robust online programme to facilitate learning to the greatest extent possible in some very challenging circumstances. Our teachers worked diligently and tirelessly to ensure students did not fall behind. Our intention is to continue with this option this year but **only** for COVID-19 situations. This signifies that students will be able to learn remotely if their families elect to keep them home because of COVID-19, or if a student is absent because she/he is symptomatic and awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test. Please note that all situations of remote learning must be arranged with and approved in advance by the principals - not the homeroom teachers - and those students who are absent for non-COVID-19 reasons will not be able to access our online programme. Finally, families should be aware this option will be phased out as soon as we are able to do so, recognizing it is not possible to predict the course of this virus nor the decisions of the government. This approach is founded on the belief that in-person instruction is clearly superior to remote learning, particularly at the elementary level.

Protective Strategies

Screening

All staff and students must self-screen every day before attending school. We will provide parents with a link to our Daily Attendance Log to perform the screening of their children before arriving at school. Self-assessment tools will be made available to staff to ensure awareness of possible symptoms of COVID-19.

All staff and students who are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, as identified in the screening tool, must not attend school and should follow the guidance provided, which may include seeking appropriate medical attention as required, and/or getting tested for COVID-19.

APA will perform daily on-site confirmation of self-screening by students, staff, and visitors prior to or upon their arrival at school.

Student Masks

Students in Grades 1 to 8 are required to wear properly-fitted, non-medical or cloth masks indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes.

Masks may be temporarily removed indoors to consume food or drink, with a minimum distance of two metres maintained within a cohort.

Students are not required to wear masks outdoors, but distancing will be encouraged between cohorts as much as possible.

Students in Kindergarten are encouraged but not required to wear non-medical or cloth masks in indoor spaces.

Staff Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Aurora Preparatory Academy will continue to provide school staff with required PPE, including masks and eye protection, as well as critical supplies and equipment such as disinfectant and hand sanitizer.

Masks are required to be worn by school staff and visitors indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes. Staff are not required to wear masks outdoors. Staff must maintain at least two metres distance when consuming food/drinks.

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

Appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are among the most important protective strategies. APA will continue to train students on appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, including the use of alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) and/or handwashing, and reinforce its use. Hand hygiene will be conducted by anyone entering the school and incorporated into the daily schedule at regular intervals during the day, above and beyond what is usually recommended. Staff and students will have the supplies they need to conduct appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and these supplies will be easily accessible.

Distancing and Congregating

As much distancing as possible between students, between students and staff, and between staff members will always be promoted. Physical distancing measures are to be layered with other public health measures such as screening, hand hygiene, cohorting, enhanced cleaning, and masking.

Desks will face forward rather than in circles or groupings.

Periods of student movement will be staggered, where possible, to limit student congregation in the hallways.

Congregation of teachers/staff will be limited to minimize potential for adult-to-adult transmission.

Recess and Breaks Outdoors

Students do not need to stay within their cohort during recess and breaks outdoors, but distancing should be encouraged between cohorts as much as possible.

Sharing materials outdoors is permitted, with appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Cleaning Programme

APA will continue with its enhanced cleaning programme. In particular, focus will be on regular hand hygiene to reduce the risk of infection related to high-touch surfaces. Cleaning plus disinfection will occur twice daily, in addition to regular disinfection by staff throughout the day. Two evenings per week, APA will have the entire building sanitized with a fogging process in which a safe, disinfecting solution - approved by Health Canada - is sprayed over every surface.

Shared Materials

Shared materials are important for learning (for example, toys for imaginative play in Kindergarten, manipulatives for math, computers and other tech materials, books, art supplies, indoor physical education equipment and shared outdoor equipment). The use of shared materials is permitted. The risk associated with transmission with shared objects is low. The focus will be on regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to reduce the risk of infection related to shared equipment.

Lunch Protocols

APA will continue to have students eat in their own classrooms, socially distanced. Once again, at least for the first term, hot lunches (pizza, pasta, souvlaki) will be suspended. They may be slowly re-introduced in the second or third term, depending on the development of cases and directives from government and health agencies. Each student must bring a separate, refillable drink bottle that is clearly labeled, kept with her/him during the day and not shared.

Assemblies

Schoolwide assemblies will continue to be suspended, at least for the first term. Smaller gatherings among students may be gradually re-introduced as the school year progresses, based on best practices.

Visitors

Once again, APA will limit to an absolute minimum the number of visitors who enter the building. Only those who are required to perform a service or provide a delivery will be permitted to enter. In addition, parents are strongly encouraged to ensure their children have all necessary supplies for the day, avoiding as much as possible any mid-day trips to the school.

Pick-up and drop-off of students will happen outside the school unless it is determined that there is an essential need for the parent/guardian to enter the building.

Ventilation

Along with our regular ventilation units and air-conditioning systems, APA has in place medical-grade standalone high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter units in all classrooms and learning environments. These units ensure particle filtration of air and improve air exchange. These units are sized for the classroom or learning environment that is being used. In addition, APA supports outdoor education where possible.

Vaccination

Vaccination is an important tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and allow students, families, and staff to resume normal activities safely. Vaccination rates may provide opportunities to reduce current COVID-19 measures over time. Keeping in line with current provincial mandates, legal requirements, and private school best practices, we are adopting a “strongly recommended” vaccination policy, which encourages everyone in our community - staff and students over the age of 12 - to receive both doses of a vaccine officially approved by Health Canada. APA will continue to offer more details on this policy as it evolves.

Presently, our intention is not to limit the participation in school life of those very few eligible members of our community who may currently remain unvaccinated, either by choice or inability, as we will continue to mitigate the risk of exposure with robust safety protocols and measures. However, it is important to recognize and accept that other schools’ programmes may restrict the participation of our unvaccinated students or attendance by our unvaccinated parents. Additionally, government and/or health agencies may revise mandates, protocols, and policies to require APA to revise its own vaccination policy. Both situations are entirely out of our control. Details will continue to be made available as soon as they are issued.

Please note we are not legally permitted to identify students or staff members who have or have not been fully or partially vaccinated, nor are we free to offer any other information that may help to determine the individual choices of our community. Teachers have been instructed to curtail all student conversation surrounding such issues.

Specific Academic Programs and Requirements

Music

Singing and the use of wind instruments will be permitted:

- Use of wind instruments will be permitted indoors within a cohort if a minimum distance of two metres or more can be maintained. We will use our largest class space for our programme;
- Singing will be permitted indoors. Masking is encouraged but not required for singing indoors if a minimum distance of two metres can be maintained between cohorts and as much distancing as possible maintained within a cohort.

Health and Physical Education

At APA, the use of the gymnasium will be permitted with distancing. High and low contact activities are permitted indoors and outdoors as follows:

- Masking is not required when playing high or low contact activities outdoors;
- Masking is encouraged for indoor sports where they can be worn safely based on the activity.

Field Trips

APA will continue with virtual field trips for the first term of the academic year but may consider off-site excursions during the second and third terms, depending on case numbers of COVID-19, mandates of the provincial government and health agencies, and best practices of private schools.

When off-site field trips resume, all participants will be screened upon arrival with the pick-up/drop-off of students happening at a designated and isolated area. Students will be cohorted throughout the duration of the trip, with the number of students and staff to a cohort varying based on grouping arrangements.

APA will keep accurate records of individuals entering the programme setting to facilitate contact tracing.

Extra-Curricular Activities and Community Use of the School Building

Clubs

The Government of Ontario is permitting the resumption of some clubs, activities, sport teams, bands and extra-curriculars. In addition, cohorts may interact outdoors with physical distancing encouraged, and indoors with masking and appropriate physical distancing.

Our intention is to re-introduce these components of school life on a gradual basis, partly because of logistical considerations and partly to adopt an abundantly-cautious approach during the first term.

Presuming the caseloads of COVID-19 remain manageable and the risk of infection low, our intention is to increase both the frequency and the breadth of these extra-curricular components of school life.

Inter-School Sport Activities

Based on the guidelines of the Government of Ontario:

- High and low contact activities are permitted outdoors without masking;
- High and low contact activities are permitted indoors. Masking is encouraged for indoor sports where they can be worn safely based on the activity.

APA will seek additional guidance and direction from the Small Schools Athletic Federation (SSAF), the organization through which we participate for all our sports teams.

Community Use of Schools

Community use of schools is being permitted by the government, provided activities are aligned with public health guidance and direction.

APA does not plan to resume the use of our building by most of the organizations who did so previously. This decision will necessarily limit the viral load on the building and work toward keeping our community safe. For the very few groups who will be permitted limited use of our location, which will take place exclusively outside school hours, they must follow health unit guidelines, self-screen for symptoms of COVID-19, and wear a mask while on the premises. APA will gather the names and contact information for anyone entering the building to facilitate contact tracing.

Management of COVID-19 at APA

Outbreak Protocols

As outlined in the Ministry of Health, an outbreak is defined as two or more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in students or staff (or other visitors) in a school with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably acquired their infection in the school (including transportation and before or after school care). The York Region Public Health Unit (YRPHU) will work with APA to determine whether epidemiological links (for example, cases in the same class, cases that are part of the same before and after school care cohort) exist between cases and whether transmission may have occurred in the school.

Additionally, the YRPHU is responsible for:

- determining if an outbreak exists;
- declaring an outbreak;
- providing direction on outbreak control measures to be implemented;
- declaring that an outbreak is over.

The YRPHU will determine which cohort(s) may be sent home (for self-isolation) in response to a case or an outbreak, or if full school closure is required based on the extent of an outbreak. In some instances, the YRPHU may give APA principals discretion, if necessary, to dismiss individuals or cohorts while awaiting the results of the public health investigation.

An outbreak can be declared over, when:

- at least 14 days have passed with no evidence of ongoing transmission that could reasonably be related to exposures in the school;
- no further ill or symptomatic individuals have been reported by the school who are associated with the initial exposed cohorts.

Prevention and Outbreak Responsibilities

As part of the outbreak response, there will be well-defined roles, responsibilities, and processes within APA and YRPHU.

APA is responsible for reporting:

- a confirmed COVID-19 case associated with the school to YRPHU and to the Ministry of Education through the daily reporting tool where they have become aware of such a case;
- absenteeism to YRPHU and to the Ministry of Education through the daily reporting tool, in accordance with provincial and local YRPHU direction.

YRPHU is responsible for:

- determining if an outbreak in a school exists;
- managing the outbreak in collaboration with the school and other relevant partners;
- providing direction on when cohorts of students can return to school or when the school can reopen;
- conducting case and contact management activities.

Measures will be taken to ensure privacy and avoid disclosure of details to the school community that would lead to identification of a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case.

Note that an outbreak does not necessarily need to be declared over for the YRPHU to recommend that the school reopen to some/all cohorts. Based on advice from the YRPHU, cohorts without evidence of transmission can be gradually brought back to school as additional information and test results become available. Basic preventive measures will be reinforced, and consideration will be given to implementing additional preventive measures and active surveillance as part of reopening.

Role of Principals

The principals of APA will:

- implement prevention measures found in guidance from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and the YRPHU, including having an accessible process in place to implement on-site screening procedures;

- cooperate and coordinate with the YRPHU and other stakeholders as required;
- maintain accurate records of staff, students, and visitors for the last 30 days;
- provide YRPHU with the name(s) and contact information of a designated point of contact for use during and/or after business hours, to ensure timely investigation and follow up cases, contacts and outbreaks (for example, classroom, before and after school programs, extra-curricular activities).

This information will include up-to-date attendance records for all staff and students, and contact information for those groups. This information will be provided to the YRPHU within 24 hours of request to ensure timely follow-up.

APA will not report all instances of ill individuals in the school setting to the YRPHU, as these are frequent occurrences and typically students have non-specific symptoms. However, as required by section 28 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, the principals are required to report to the medical officer of health if they are of the opinion that a student has or may have a communicable disease. As such, principals will contact the YRPHU if they have concerns about COVID-19 student-related absences or attendance concerns within our community.

The YRPHU may be consulted if there are questions about the management of individuals with symptoms, environmental cleaning, and other measures, as necessary.

In collaboration with the YRPHU, the principals will communicate proactively with the school community about COVID-19 prevention measures and about how symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals, cases, and outbreaks will be handled.

Communicating with the School Community

Parents, students and staff have an understandable interest in knowing when a COVID-19 positive case has been identified in the school.

As such, APA has a COVID-19 advisory section on our website where we will clearly post information and updates regarding confirmed cases of COVID-19 that involves a student or a staff member in a school setting.

Note that no personal information will be made public. As cases for students or staff members are resolved, APA will update the COVID-19 advisory section of our website to remove information about these cases.

In the interests of privacy, information posted will not identify the student or staff member that has received a positive COVID-19 test.

If YRPHU advises that a class, cohort or a school will be closed for a period of time, parents, students and staff will be notified immediately. Notice of any closures of classes, cohorts or schools will be posted our COVID-19 advisory section.

Reporting COVID-19 Absences

APA must report on a daily basis any confirmed cases of COVID-19 within schools to the Ministry of Education via the school absence online reporting tool. The purpose of collecting this data is to monitor

the potential impact of COVID-19 across schools in Ontario. Note that the absence data collected will not be for the purpose of contact tracing and no personal information will be submitted.

Any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 within the school must be reported to the YRPHU to support case management and contact tracing and other activities in accordance with all applicable legislation, including the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. YRPHU officials will determine any additional steps required, including but not limited to the declaration of an outbreak and closure of classes or schools. If requested by the YRPHU, APA principals may dismiss individuals or cohorts while awaiting the results of the public health investigation.

Return to School

Individuals who have had a COVID-19 test because of symptoms but who test **negative** can return to school if they do not have a fever, if their symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if vomiting or diarrhea), if they have not been directed to self-isolate, and if they have had no contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Where an individual has tested **positive** for COVID-19, the YRPHU will be in contact with APA to provide further direction for both the individual and their high-risk close contacts, including household members. The individual cannot return to school until cleared by the YRPHU.

If the individual with symptoms is **not tested**, s/he should self-isolate (including from household members) for a period of 10 days. Whether they are tested or not, the period of self-isolation should start from the date of symptom onset.

For an ill individual who has a **known alternative diagnosis** *provided by a health care professional*, return to school can occur if s/he does not have a fever and symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if vomiting or diarrhea). Individuals will still need to use the Daily Attendance Log before attending school.

Records Management

Working with the YRPHU

In the event that APA is made aware of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 for staff or students, it is essential that key information pertaining to staff and students be available upon request by the YRPHU for the purposes of contact tracing. This information will be accessible by the principals on short notice, both during and outside of school hours, when requested by the YRPHU. The principals have a system with YRPHU to ensure that these records can be accessed at all times.

The following information will be available:

- attendance records, class lists, and seating charts;
- before-and-after child care lists;
- transportation lists and seating charts;
- up-to-date contact information for parents, staff and students.