

# Remote-learning equation difficult for divisions

## Some Manitoba students still waiting on e-learning lesson plans three weeks after start of school

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Some Manitoba students who are immunocompromised or live with at-risk family members have yet to be assigned to a virtual classroom this year — three weeks after their peers went back to school.

"Knowing how far behind I am and knowing how much I'm going to have to catch up on all my classes is really stressful," said Brooke Beaulieu, a Grade 12 student in the Winnipeg School Division.

Owing to existing health conditions, Beaulieu was approved for remote delivery earlier this month and soon started receiving assignments from teachers at Grant Park High School while she awaited more details from the division.

After numerous phone calls and emails between her mother and administrators, she found out late last week she has to take her five fall courses through a mix of the division's virtual school and InformNet, the province's online high school.

She has to start the school year over again, yet she still hasn't met all her new teachers.

Manitoba Education has mandated the province's 37 school boards provide division-level remote instruction for students who are medically advised not to return to school because of COVID-19-related factors.

The back-to-school plan states the option is not to be provided through classroom teachers; general guidelines aside, it leaves divisions to sort out details. The result has been a patchwork of plans, from the Louis Riel School Division's aptly named Learning from Home School to the "online learning community" of teachers and students in Pembina Trails School Division. For some families, it has also resulted in frustration as administrators continue ironing out details.

The *Free Press* spoke with six families who have been approved for remote schooling in Manitoba, but remain unclear about their children's learning plans.

"I didn't expect a solid plan right off the hop, but it's surprising to me that there's no (virtual teacher) yet," said Krystal Payne, whose Grade 3 daughter is awaiting information about the Winnipeg School Division's online French immersion school.

Since Sept. 8, she has been communicating with her daughter's principal about how to proceed since Payne's elderly father lives with them. For the time being, it's been through occasional video calls with classroom teachers and coursework.

Division spokeswoman Radean Carter said classroom teachers have been providing work to remote families throughout September, while the province's largest school division has been hiring teachers, approving medical notes, distributing technology and finalizing virtual school plans.

While Carter said English students started virtual classes last week, the division is still trying to hire a French teacher.

"From our perspective, our virtual school is a good news story. We're really pleased with how quickly it's come together," Carter said, adding that on Sept. 8, only four medical accommodations had been approved. That number has since grown to 388, including students with notes and those who cannot attend class because of the bus drivers' strike.

Cory Cameron at the St. James Assiniboia School Division echoed those comments. Cameron said families might have received limited coursework in September because in-class teachers have been busy teaching new public health protocols at school rather than curriculum.

After Oct. 1, approximately 60 remote learners can expect the division's remote program, Cameron said, adding logistics are communicated through individual schools. Considering it will have taken four weeks to organize, he considers it a success in terms of timing.

At the same time, given the sudden pivot to remote instruction in March, mother Lisa Young said she expected the program would be more organized for her daughter in Grade 6 and other students. Young said she was initially told St. James Assiniboia remote instruction would start Sept. 14.

"I hope it comes all together and we're able to do things every day and have it consistent," said Young, who applied for remote instruction because she and her husband are at-risk, adding she has felt bad about continuously prodding the principal and teachers for more work and answers. [maggie.macintosh@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:maggie.macintosh@freepress.mb.ca)