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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: THE NEW AGENT ORANGE

Thinking back to January 2020/21, if you asked any educator in this province if they felt we would be in the exact same place a year later, anyone with any common sense would probably tell you that we would be a lot further out of this unprecedented pandemic than we are. Yet here we are in January 2021/22, reliving the whole remote versus in-person debate once more.

This time we are far more bloodied, raw and scarred from battle, our provincial public health and government generals are running out, ... no... have run out of fight it seems. And we the teachers, remain as always, in the trenches defending our profession and our students with epic but not unexpected vigor.

- **Practice, experience and will** – As teachers you have retooled and upgraded your arsenal like never before. It is often said there will be many good things that stay in place post Covid-19, and I know from listening to you in your work, many of you will keep changes and new things added. Teachers are never satisfied nor can we remain stagnant in our work. I encourage you to think of changes you have made that lessen your workload, and improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience for both you and your students and their families. You worked hard to make and embrace these changes.

- **Passion, camaraderie and hope** – There is no question only teachers get teachers, and I think this whole experience has amplified that. We must acknowledge there have clearly been lows, but you have continued to communicate and work with each other through these. ITA and MTS will continue to support you and are fighting for safety, (please read the next pages). But you must afford yourself moments to have hope. It is messy and ugly, and we have struggled. You have also done great things. I hope this remote session was easier on you and your students. We are still in the fight, it's true, but there is hope that we are gaining ground. Please reach out to itapres@mbteach.org. Keep yourself and your loved ones as safe as you can.

Important Information

Schools open January 17 in **Restricted Level Orange**, [Restoring Safe Schools Orange \(gov.mb.ca\)](https://www.gov.mb.ca/restoring-safe-schools). It is important to note the Orange wording is different from last year, so please read the link, and do not hesitate to contact me at itapres@mbteach.org with any questions.

Right to refuse dangerous work: Members have been asking about the right to refuse dangerous work. As long as our employer follows the points under current level orange, work may not be considered dangerous, and therefore members may not refuse. Having said that, if you have any concerns regarding exercising this right, **MTS is advising that you contact an MTS Staff Officer directly at 204-831-3055, or toll free: 1-800-262-8803.**

Teacher welfare staff officers are very well versed on the legislation governing this process, legal advice on if/when a teacher would be justified in invoking their right to refuse dangerous work, and nuances of the language. Each refusal is managed on a case-by-case basis, and when teachers contact MTS, they are provided with the information on the work refusal process. Staff officers may also suggest other steps that can be taken. PLEASE CALL even if unsure.

Here are a few major points in Orange:

- **All students are in class learning unless otherwise directed by public health** – Unlike last year, students can't attend part time or every second day, etc.
- **Schools must ensure 2 m of physical distancing to the greatest extent possible** – I attended the Jan 10 virtual board meeting where this was discussed at length. Senior admin has asked schools to **do everything they can within their building with all students attending to make this work. 2 m is not going to happen in every school.**
- **All teachers and staff are required to wear medical-grade masks.** Medical-grade disposable masks have been issued to all schools. N95 masks are not required.

Rapid Tests & Testing Options: There will be information coming soon regarding the recent announcement around rapid tests for symptomatic education staff, or schools of high concern or with outbreaks. In today's presser, new testing centers were announced (PCR drive-thru and rapid test by appointment) and teachers can still make appointments at the [Fast Pass](#) sites. Please go to [Province of Manitoba | Find a Testing Location](#) for the full list and other info.

Ventilation in ISD: In 2020/21, ISD received \$467,000 specific to ventilation projects. A Delta HVAC control system is used by ISD and was upgraded to remotely monitor all schools HVAC systems. This allows them to remotely monitor air movement and control dampers, and monitor CO₂ and keep near outdoor levels (400 – 500 ppm). They are using the highest-grade filters that our heating/air conditioning systems will accept.

For 2021/22, ISD submitted requests for approx. \$609,000 toward more ventilation projects. They were granted \$411,000. Items approved were 82 new unit ventilators to be installed across 5 schools needing upgrades (SCI, Stony Mountain, TCI, WES and WCI) in the next 6 months. All ISD schools were tested and all other schools met the accepted standard. Items not approved but requested were duct cleaning and dust collection upgrades.

News & Current Issues

Back-pay and COLA:

- We are in the final (4th) year of our Collective Agreement (CA) that ends June 30, 2022, and will receive an increase for the 2021/22 school year at the rate of the provincial cost of living increase once it is finalized.
- COLA is normally calculated in January/February for the previous year.
- Once the division knows the COLA increase, they will adjust all grids by this amount. This may take into February/March. This will then be applied to our salaries on a specific date, you will see an increase for that pay period, and for the remainder of the CA.
- As of the date the increase is applied, the employer will then calculate back-pay from September 1, 2021 to the date we first see the final increase in pay.
- 2021/22 premiums – STD to remain at 0.21% (no change); LTD lowering from 1.90% to 1.75%; Dental rates lowering as we have a surplus. Calculation coming after COLA.

Bargaining: MTS is building the first province wide opening package (with data from surveys and local regional meetings) to begin Provincial Bargaining this spring. Bill 45 (sends us all to provincial bargaining) has been approved at MB leg, but not proclaimed. MTS is ready, but if the province chooses not to engage in Provincial Bargaining, ITA will initiate the local bargaining cycle in April.

Reminder! MTS Member and Family Assistance Program (MFAP) is active.

Services include individual therapy, and counselling for family and couples, legal and financial needs, grief and bereavement, diet and nutrition, substance abuse and crisis and trauma. Access Code is: MTSMFAP



HumanCare Access Code

24 HOURS A DAY ANYWHERE IN NORTH AMERICA
1-800-661-8193

www.humanacare.com/mts
Access Code: MTSMFAP



Other bits...

- Members can access up to \$850 per calendar year for extended health services.
- You can receive 80% reimbursement if eligible, on many things from orthotics, hearing aids, medical appliances, prescription drugs (90% at Costco), and eye exams.
- For the complete list of all your extended health benefits (Blue Cross), go [HERE](#).

Helpful Links:

- Self-Isolation: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/fundamentals/self-isolation.html>
- Covid Testing: [https:// www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/](https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/)
- Vaccinations/Boosters: [https:// www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/vaccine/index.html](https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/vaccine/index.html)

Reach out with any questions or concerns to the **new address:** itapres@mbteach.org